

88.27 fourth card

- 25. ~~General~~ Griesbach, General
- 26. Winkler, Hal
- 27. Horricks, Charlie
- 28. Furlong, Burt
- 29. Athabasca Citizen's Band
- 30. Lanson Hubbard Company
- 31. Hudson's Bay Company
- 32. ~~Alivik, NWT~~
- 33. Fort Norman, NWT
- 34. Great Slave lake, NWT
- 35. Fort Resolution, NWT

88.27

~~GREEN OSCAR~~

Unpublished manuscript of Oscar Green's account of his days working on the steam boat "The S.S. Distributor", on the Athabasca, Slave and MacKenize Rivers during the 1920's and early 1930's. Oscar Green came to Athabasca Landing in 1911. Donated by daughter Mildred Phillips.

- 1. The S.S. Distributor

88.27 second card

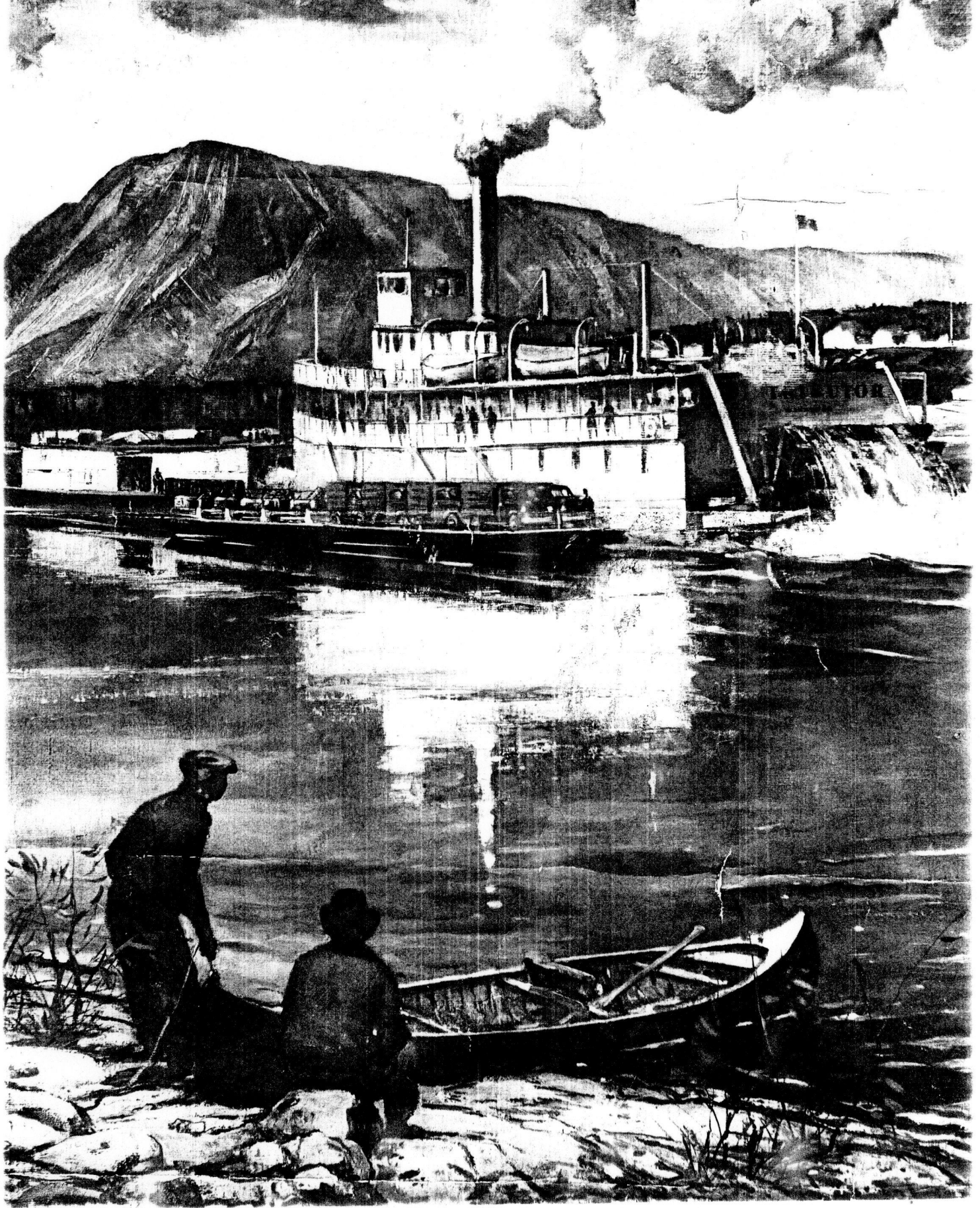
- 2. ~~Steamer - The S.S. Distributor~~
- 3. ~~Captain~~ Alexander, Captain
- 4. Bird, Joe
- 5. Davis, Slim
- 6. Calhoon, Mr.
- 7. Day, ~~Bill~~ William Ryley (Bill)
- 8. Haas, Dick
- 9. Ryan, Mickey
- 10. Ryan, Katy (Katie?)
- 11. Stark, Jack
- 12. Bain, Slim

88.27 fifth card

- 36. Fort McMurray, Alberta
- 37. Fort Fitzgerald, Alberta
- 38. Fort Chipewyan, Alberta
- 39. Vermilion Chutes, Alberta
- 40. Fort Smith, Alberta
- 41. Great Bear Lake, NWT
- 42. Fort Franklin, NWT
- 43. Fort Simpson, NWT
- 44. Fort Good Hope, NWT
- 45. New Chicago, NWT
- 46. Fort Providence, NWT

88.27 third card

- 13. Brasseau, Tuffy
- 14. Gifford, Tiny
- 15. Haight, ~~Captain~~ Edward Benjamin (Capt.), 1862-
- 16. ~~Captain~~ Smelly, Captain
- 17. Ayr, Benny
- 18. Johnson, Doug
- 19. ~~Captain~~ Mills, James William (Captain), 1859-1933
- 20. ~~Colonel~~ Reed, Colonel
- 21. ~~Captain~~ Nyler, Captain
- 22. Malcom, Bill
- 23. McMullin, Stan McMullin
- 24. ~~Steamer - N.T.C.L. Raduim Trader~~





NORTH - by Oscar Green as told in October, 1987

This is Oscar Green born on March 1, 1902 and came to Athabasca Landing in the spring of 1911. After a few years got a job with Captain Alexander preparing the old Slave River steam boat to take it down the Athabasca River to Ft. McMurray. Then to operate from Ft. McMurray to Ft. Chipewyan to Ft. Fitzgerald. Also to meet the D.A. Thomas steamboat from Peace River at Vermilion Chute portage.

However getting the boat ready was quite a little chore and I learned quite a few things that I had never done or heard about before and learned how to put tar on the seams underneath the boat where it had been corked with oakum. To do this they took two lids and fastened them together, took a pail and made a handle on it and put a kind of rope around between the two lids which had little flanges on them and rolled this underneath on the seams which lifted the tar up and covered the oakum and the seams underneath the boat.

In 1918 the water was too low so the trip was postponed until the spring of 1919. We left Athabasca Landing on the 22nd day of May, 1919 and arrived at Grande Rapids and there we tied up overnight and at 7:00 in the morning of May 23, 1919 we went over the Grande Rapids. We hit mainly three large boulders, making several holes in the bottom of the boat which was about 130 or 140 feet long with a paddle wheel on the back and a steam boiler fired by wood. We got to the bottom of Grande Rapids with a bunch of holes in the bottom of the boat (or the hull), tied up to the bank and the Captain and myself and some of the crew went to work putting what we called soft patches over these holes where the boards were broken up between the ribs of the boat.

The ribs were about six inches wide and ten inches high and approximately a foot between ribs. We had made these soft patches by cutting up hardwood boards and nailing oakum, talo, guinnie sacks and canvas to make the so called "soft patches". Then we cut posts which were about 4 inches square, leaving them with enough room to put on top of the soft patches and by having two hardwood wedges that tapered from about six inches down to one-eighth of an inch which gave us a total of about 12 inches to press the patch down from the floor or joist above. This would stop the most of the water and force the broken planks back into their original place as much as possible.

However there was one large hole where the water was really gushing in which was behind the cribbing around the boiler, that is the front part of the boiler where the tubes are and there was no way to get into this cribbing as it was made of about 4 x 4 hardwood braces with about 3/4 inch bolts slanting through and bolting it all together and the forward part of the boiler, or I should say the backward part of the boiler where the tubes were, was inside of this more or less crib. However, after trying - several people tried to get through the hole that was in the cribbing but were unable to do so - Captain Alexander says "We got to get through!" So he asked me to have a try. I took off my clothes (we were standing in water up to our waists) and the Captain put water on me and everything and pushed and pulled until finally I got inside the crib and was able to stop the water from gushing up. Prior to that all of the pumps and the siphons were unable to keep the water down. The water was gaining and the boat would have sank as it was quite a depth of water in the eddy below the falls. When we got the water pumped out we proceeded on down the river. We were very, very lucky to have Joe Bird for a pilot as he had taken several other boats down through the Grande Rapids and on down to McMurray prior to this one.

We didn't know but we did hear hearsay which may be true or false that Mr. Calhoon of the King Edward Hotel in Edmonton and J.H. Brian who had a coal mine as well as bought and sold fur had interested a company in the States known as Lanson Hubbard Co. and they had opened up several posts up north and down the Mackenzie River.

However, after going through all of the rapids (there is about 80 miles of rapids and there's what they call the Big Cascade, Little Cascade, Boiler Rapids, Wrigley Rapids, Crooked Rapids and so forth. However the Grande Rapids was the main



stumbling block) we arrived at McMurray and immediately got a load and went to Fitzgerald (Ft. Fitzgerald). We made several trips, stopping at Ft. Chipewyan on the way, down to Fitzgerald, up the Vermillion Chutes for the freight was brought from Peace River by the D.A. Thomas and its about a two mile or two and one half mile portage around Vermillion Chutes. Here we were joined by a new employee who we called Slim Davis. I will tell you more about Slim Davis later on.

However the chief engineer had made a tool box and I had made arrangements with one of the other employees to go out shooting partridge since there was no restrictions at that time and he told me that on my time off I would paint his tool box he had just made. I told him "no" that I was going hunting but that I would paint it on my shift on when I was going back on - we had shifts of six hours on and six off. However, he didn't agree to that so he fired me! Well in the meantime Captain Alexander and I had become reasonably good friends and I had learned all about the boat and loading and unloading and all that and the Captain told me to stay there on the portage, that was Vermillion Chute portage, and Mr. Calhoon was there in charge of the portage. So I stayed until they came back about a week later. The Captain was going to take me on as mate but didn't want to do so for fear of upsetting the engineer who had fired me.

However they needed someone at Ft. Smith on the boat they were building which was named the "Distributor". They were putting machinery in and getting it ready to go. In fact we took off with the Distributor before it was finished, that is the upper structure. We took off without a pilothouse and no doors in front of the boiler and no asbestos covering over the the boiler and so forth. We took off and went as far north as Aklavik just short of the Artic Ocean about 70 miles.

One of the boys came and said "There's somebody at Aklavik that knows you and wants to see you" and he pointed out the schooner he was in. So I went down to the schooner. You had to slide the door back and go inside as everything was down inside. Here was Bill Day from Athabasca Landing who formerly I believe had owned and run the Grande Union Hotel at Athabasca along with his wife. However something happened and they quarreled or something and Bill went north. But he was sure glad to see me. Then he introduced me to his wife who was an Eskimo woman and had tatoo marks from her mouth down to her chin. I never had seen anything like that before so you can imagine what I was thinking.



However we went back to Ft. Smith and the pilot that we had had went out to Edmonton for some reason, sickness or whatever, and he came back and he was on I believe our next, or third trip, down the following year and I had been put on as second mate on the Distributor. Prior to that I was the fireman. I might also tell you about my experiences as fireman before I tell you about the pilot.

I was working away and the chief engineer that was putting the machinery in was Dick Haus from Victoria and apparently he was engineer on the boat running from Vancouver to Victoria and he had been loaned to the company to help get this boat under construction and on its way. I was working on the boiler after washing it all out and everything and putting what is called "hand hold covers" in and gaskets and the chief came along and asked me if I knew anything about setting the valves. I said "I don't know too much but I have helped set the valves on an old threshing machine out at a saw mill at Long Lake". So he asked me how it was done and I told him that using calipers and punch marks that you were able to set the valves and reset the timing of the valves on the eccentrics that way by using calipers and punch marks.

So away he went and after a while he came along and I had my back turned and he hit me on the back and he said "By golly you got 'er". So he was very, very happy.

Then they had a lot of trouble trying to keep up steam because it was a boiler which had two doors, one for wood and one for coal, and there was no firewall which was



Oscar Green, Katy (stewardess) who later married Mickey Ryan. The other lady the chief stewardess on the Slave River steamboat. Slim Davis who later became Superintendent of MacKenzie River Transport for Hudson Bay Co.

needed inside to keep the cold air from getting in the flues. And the wood! Nobody knew what size the firebox was going to be so the wood was cut the same as it had been cut for the previous steam boats which was only about 3 foot firebox. So you can imagine trying to fire a firebox about seven feet long and about 4 feet wide and trying to keep up steam and no asbestos covering over the boiler which is necessary. However I did very well but the other firemen didn't have such good luck and it was real hard work. We worked four hours on and eight off so you can imagine how hard we worked and we burned from three to three and one half cord of wood an hour. Anyway, it was the next year they put in the fire walls which helped quite a bit.

Now I will go back to the pilot. I believe he was Jack Stark but we had two pilots - Jack Stark and Slim Bain - so I'm not sure which one it was. But anyway that year I had been put on as second mate and it was about 12 or 1 o'clock at night and there was myself and the engineer and pilot on duty. The boat was lifting up on the left side and swaying. So as I was actually in charge of the boat I told the engineer to reverse the paddle wheel, that we were going to go crossways in the river and hit the shore. He says "I can't without a bell and there was no way or nothing that I could climbup and ring the bell. Had I been able to climb up and ring the bell, he

would have been able to answer the bell accordingly. So I had to run all the way up to the pilot house which is two decks up - you have the promenade deck, the Texas deck, and then the pilot house. I ran all the way up these stairs to find the pilot had gone to sleep and as the boat was controlled by steam steering, the weight of his hands and arm on the steering had caused the boat to turn in the river he had gone to sleep. So I woke him up, he took a quick look but he was smart enough not to push the steering too far and the boat went over and hit the shore a glancing blow. You could feel the whole structure creak and crack as it hit the bank. However no damage was done and we went on our way.

Coming back from our last trip to Aklavik, between Ft. Norman and Ft. Wrigley I believe it was, the water was quite low and we were late and trying to make time and as the boat pushes a certain amount of water ahead of it, we ran into a hole in the sandbar or a gravel bar, but we were very lucky that the captain on the boat had previous experience on the Mississippi River so he had already accumulated what looked like telephone poles and used them as spars with pulleys on top and cables to the steam wench and we set two on each side and actually lifted the boat up and walked it out backwards downstream by running the engine in reverse and the paddle wheel throwing water underneath the boat, we managed to get out and get back into a channel and had no more trouble getting back to Ft. Smith.

Well one of the trips when I was second mate and I had gone to bed and they had stopped to load wood and for some reason or other the crew went on strike. They wouldn't load anymore wood so the captain sent the first mate to call me. So I went down. This was shortly after breakfast in the morning. I went down and ordered some breakfast from the cook who I knew very well because I had helped him sometimes when he was quite busy. So I knew a little bit about it and we knew each other. Anyway he put together a breakfast for me and I started to eat and then one of the boys who was on strike said "How about me"? I said "Sure, you want some breakfast?" So I ordered some for him. He sat and ate and I didn't say anything but I went out and started packing wood onto the boat and started singing an old song "Jera, Jera, Gee. Gee, Jazz", something like that. First thing I knew the whole bunch of them fell in and started packing wood and that was the end of the strike.

However that fall it was too late and they were pulling all of the boats out of the water and we couldn't take the steamboat down the river anymore. But they had a few things that came late that they had to deliver to the posts along the way, also to take the mail down to Ft. Norman and Ft. Good Hope. So they called for volunteers. Not knowing very much about the North and that and being quite inquisitive, I volunteered. There was another boy there who was a returned soldier who was about one-quarter Indian I think who was named Tuffy Brasseur. So I asked him if he wanted to go with me and he said "Yes, I would." So they got busy and they built a small scow about 30 feet long and about 8 feet wide and they also built hand pumps as was normal - they did this with all the scows that were made to pump out the water. So we were loaded up. But prior to that we were taken up to Ft. Chipewyan on the old Slave River steam boat and dropped off and we brought a lifeboat down from Ft. Chipewyan to Ft. Fitzgerald which belonged to the Distributor and brought some goods that we had to take with us. However neither one of us had paid very much attention to the rivers and that because we were not pilots. Well I happened to be running the outboard motor on this lifeboat and we came to a spot where there was a rapids right across what is called Slave River (that is the continuation of the Peace River) normally you go behind an island here. I'll tell you more about this island and the falls later on.

When taking the lifeboat down we came upon this - not knowing because we didn't know the river well enough. However we got through fine and went back to Ft. Smith and got our things loaded and everything for the North. We started off and we got down the river about 8 miles and we met the Distributor coming back which had made a quick run down someplace and back again - I believe it was Resolution. The captain blew the whistle and had us come along side and said "Where are you going?"

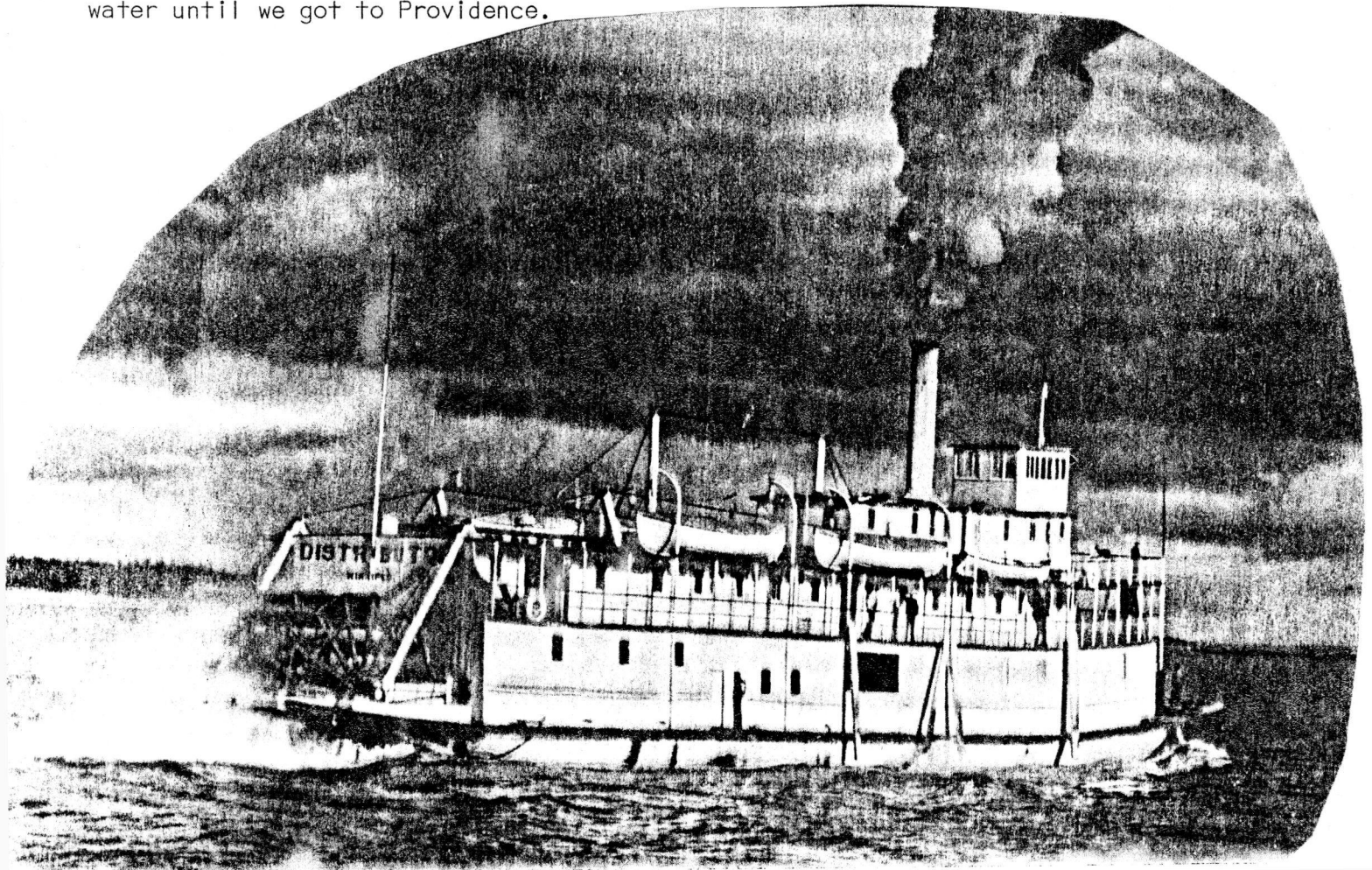


"We're going to Ft. Norman". He said "You are like \_\_\_\_" He said "Pull along side 'em fast boys'" He took us back to Ft. Smith and while he was still in the pilot house Tommy Woodman who was a superintendent from Ft. Chipewyan- he really bawled him out.

They had already taken this gas boat out and put it ashore but he made them load the boats back into the water and take us supposedly across Great Slave Lake to Providence where they were going to turn us loose again.

So we got off and we got to Resolution okay. There was not too much shelter at Resolution but there is a long dock running out into the lake. Anyway we started off from Resolution to Providence which we have to cross Great Slave Lake and we usually go by Hay River and across to Wrigely Harbour and on to Providence. We got out a ways to what is known as Burnt Island and there we stayed. We were there for two to three weeks. We couldn't go out on account of the storm, so you can imagine how lucky we are that the Captain had enough sense to make sure that they launched this boat and took us at least as far as Providence.

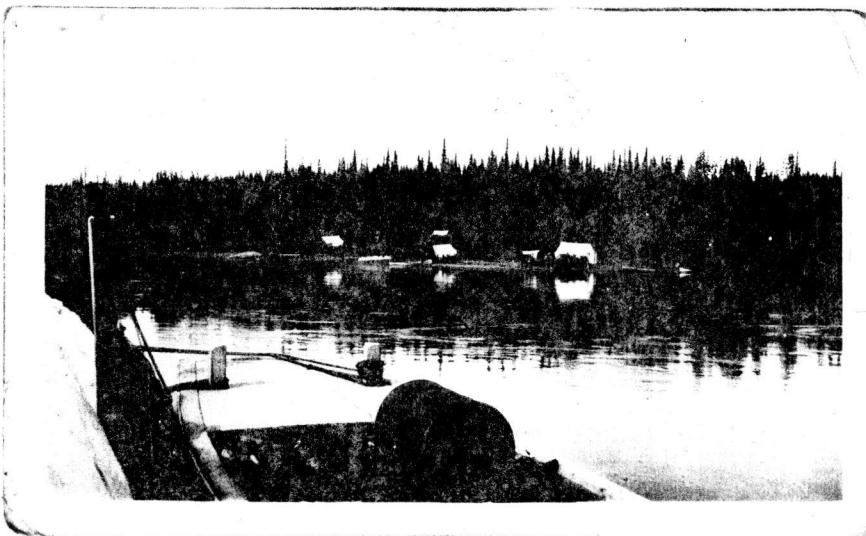
However, when we finally got to Providence we had quite a bit of trouble. We were crossing from Hay River to Wrigely Harbour and a very light head wind. We were on about an 80 foot tow line and the waves knocked the oakum out from the newly built boat and water was pouring in faster than we could pump it out. We couldn't make them hear and nobody looked so my partner, he says "I'm going to shoot off the rifle". So he fired a shot and nothing happened. So he fired another shot and nothing happened. We could see the pilot sitting up there and the sun was shining and he was steering with his feet! We could see him through the back window of the pilot house but nobody looked back. Just as he fired the next shot the pilot opened the door but when he heard the shot he closed it back quickly! Then he looked back and we waved him down. So then when they stopped the boat, pulled us along side and they had a few empty barrels that they were taking down which they would load onto our boat. They had burnt up gas in <sup>some</sup> and some empties they were taking anyway. So they took all the stuff off of our scow and put it on the boat which was about 80 feet long and put the barrels on our scow and roped them down and left us there to pump water until we got to Providence.



At Providence they had our boat pulled out and had it fixed. There they were supposed to leave us and send us on our own on the MacKenzie River. However somehow there was a wireless there or something telling them to take us all the way to the Ft. Norman oilwell which they did. So we arrived fine at Ft. Norman oilwell but we were on our own again. We had around 200 miles to go to Ft. Good Hope down through I believe they call it Sand Sue Rapids which is more or less shallow limestone bottom but not too dangerous. However just above Ft. Good Hope is the very rough water but we got there okay. We had a choice - we could cut wood or we could go trapping. They had given us an order that at all the posts we could pick up anything we wanted as we went along. So we had picked up some traps and ammunition, etc.

We left Ft. Good Hope and we went around 55 miles down river from Ft. Good Hope and we saw a little bit of timber there - the biggest trees were around four or five inches in diameter. However, we thought we could stop there and cut wood. We cut a little wood and then we started trapping because it was the beginning of October then and there the frost is only out about for or five inches in the moss and underneath is frozen. We had to build a cabin and so forth and so on. Then during the winter there was an Indian family which lived directly across the MacKenzie River from us which was about 4 miles wide at that point. We started trading a little goods for fur from the Indians, not knowing the customs of the North, and my partner had had a little experience trapping.

We were catching foxes and martens and muskrats galore and we run out of tobacco and we tried everything. We tried tea, coffee, willowbark, everything but it didn't satisfy our want for tobacco. The Catholic Mission priest at Ft. Good Hope had give us three dogs (or loaned us I should say) three dogs, harness, toboggan, two canoes. So we hooked up the dogs and went the 55 miles to get tobacco. There was rough ice, high ridges of ice, etc. We had to make later trips too as we found out to our sorrow that we were not allowed to trade with the Indians and we were Lanson Hubbard employees and we were trading with Hudson Bay Indians which was getting the manager of the store in trouble because of what we were doing. So he wouldn't give us anymore than a month's supply. I said "How about the standing order I got here? You are supposed to furnish us with whatever we want". "Yes", he said, "I know you've got it. I've read it, but to enforce it the closest policeman is Ft. McPherson and by the time you go down there and get back here it will be spring and I won't care". Then he told me how we were getting him in trouble by trading with the Indians. So that meant about every 30 days we had to make a trip to Ft. Good Hope and back which was about around 110 miles by dogteam.

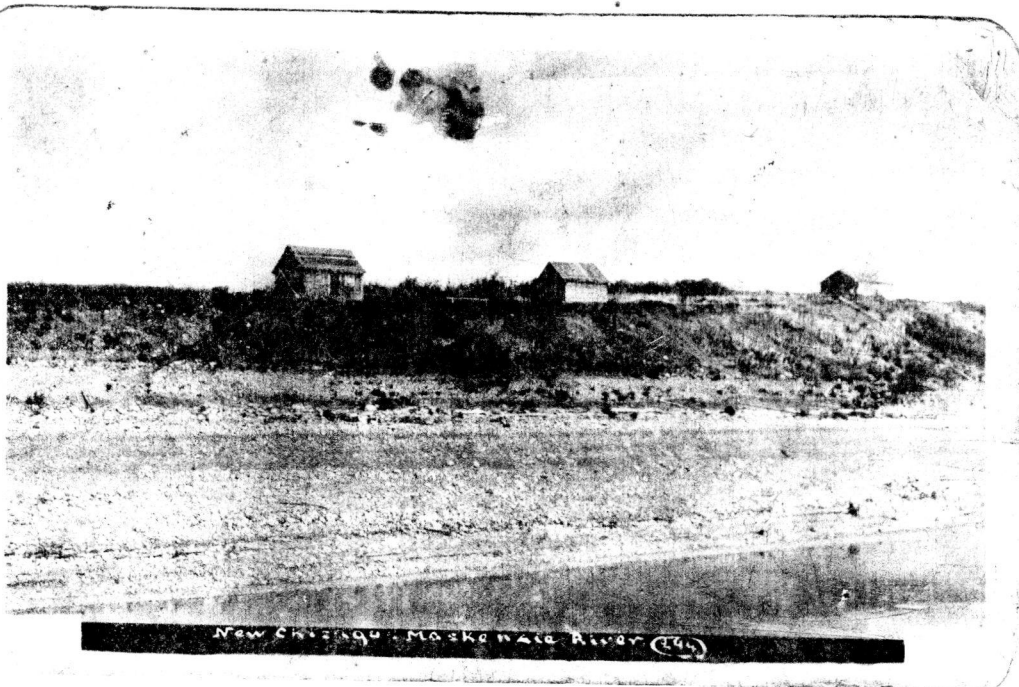


Indian camp  
on MacKenzie River  
between Ft Simpson  
& Ft. Wapiti



Later on my partner Tuffy Brazeau thought he was sick and had to see a doctor. The closest doctor was at Ft. McPherson another two hundred miles further down the river. By this time there was a few feet of water running along the edge of the ice - between the bank and the ice on the MacKenzie - so we started off. We got down approximately 50 miles where the Yukoners had camped in 1898 and there was an Indian family living there. During the night the ice broke up and started flowing in the river so we were marooned there around two weeks or so. We were running out of food. There were lots of ducks and geese so we were living solely on wild duck and geese and this elderly Indian sent me and his wife from the house about 30 feet by the riverbank. She pulled up what looked like a little bush and started to eat the roots and handed them to me to eat. I ate some and it tasted something like sweet potatoes so I took it back to the cabin and this elderly Indian told me that if white man would eat that root we wouldn't get sick. I assumed that was scurvy as most people had died from scurvy when just eating meat without any flour or anything to go with it. By the time the ice went out my partner thought he was alright and so we went back upstream to our cabin.

Shortly afterwards up comes a man from Ft. McPherson which we knew personally from the old Slave River steamboat. We called him Tiny Gifford as he was fairly large and



*cabin on right  
where we stayed*

probably weighed around 300 pounds. Here I should mention about Tiny Gifford. He apparently came from Ontario and was a very capable canoe man and someone had got him to volunteer to take life boats of the Distributor down through Smith Rapids which were rapids and nearly impossible. However, my partner and I didn't know this and hadn't seen the rapids nor anything. However, they took Tiny down to look at the rapids and after he looked at the rapids he just said he didn't want to take the boats through. However we tried every way to get him to take the boats through but he would not do so. We didn't know at that time how lucky we were for there was no one, Indians or anyone, who runs the rapids. There is a sixteen mile portage between Smith and Fitzgerald.

So Tiny Gifford told us about the big boom at Ft. Norman and all you had to do was drive a stake in the ground and go up to Ft. Norman and sell your claim. So we left everything behind and started off and if I remember correctly we took the dogs in the canoe up to Good Hope and there we arranged to send somebody down to pick up the canoe and sleigh because that belonged to the mission at Ft. Good Hope.

We went on to Ft. Norman and staked claims where the oil wells are there 50 miles below Ft. Norman itself. When we got up to Ft. Norman we were offered \$30,000 apiece for our claims and all we had done was file our names and location and so forth and drive stakes in the ground. But there was other people there who told us we were foolish to sell them at that price when at Ft. Smith you could get two or three times that price. So we didn't sell them and we waited there for the Distributor to come down. So the Distributor took us on to Aklavik and back to Ft. Smith. By the time we got to Ft. Smith you couldn't even sell the claims for \$1.00. So we never got any money out of our claims after all our trouble.

Finally when the depression came and I had gone broke in the business I was in, I went down to the Hudson's Bay and applied for a job. They had already hired most of the crew and I wasn't getting any place. Captain Smelly was there doing the hiring and I didn't know him at that time. I took hold of the handle of the door and was leaving and Captain Haight came in. He was very surprised that I was there. He asked me what I was doing there and I told him that I was looking for a job. Captain Smelley says "You know this boy?" He says "Sure I know him. I raised him!" So anyway to make a long story short, I got a job. I was sent back at the earliest possible time and when I landed at Ft. McMurray who do I find in charge except Slim Davis. As I said before Slim Davis came down on the D.A. Thomas as a purser for the Slave River Steamboat and that's the last I ever heard of him until I met him here as Superintendent of the MacKenzie River Transport. However he was very glad to see me and I was glad to see him.

So I went down and helped him prepare the Athabasca River to go in the water and run one of the hoist engines lowering the boat into the edge of the water. It had three sets, four sets I believe it was, of cables with all kinds of heavy rope tied and you let it down so far on the ways, then at a signal everybody cut these ropes and let it slide into the water.

In my absence Davis had been a very important man with the Hudson's Bay Co. and I worked I believe two years or more with him. In fact he took me off of the boat with some trouble at Ft. Norman where the engineer at that time, I believe his name was Mavis, he wouldn't let me go unless Davis would promise to pay me quite a bit more than I was getting on the boat - on the Distributor. However that was arranged. I had nothing to say about it. So they took me off and I found out later Davis along with some other person had overhauled one of the engines and couldn't get it to run properly. So I sat down and found out from Davis exactly what they had done, thought it over, and went to work on it and got it back to it's normal condition where it could push freight that it couldn't handle otherwise.



" LAST OF THE STEAMBOATS. 1924 - 1944 "



I think I have missed some of the important things that would be interesting to anyone knowing the north or travelling the north and one of them was I was sent out, this was on the second time when I was employed up north in 1921 or so and I was working from Ft. Norman up to Bear Lake and in leaving Hudson Bay warehouse we had a captain from Vancouver who had never been there (or never been across Great Slave Lake) and the man in charge at Ft. Smith told the captain who was put in charge of a whole bunch of small boats and I was engineer on one of them - one of the bigger ones and I was in charge of all the engineers and the engineering part of the boats but had a lot of prior experience on the lake. If he wanted more information he was to get it from me.

So the captain asked me in leaving Ft. Resolution which way to go and so forth and then I went to lay down to get some sleep. I slept for a couple of hours and then the captain came and called me and said "Come on, I want you to look and see how we are doing". Prior to that I had told him to head out for Burnt Island, then follow the shoreline to the left until he picked up the buoy at Hay River, then to turn right and follow the shoreline, being approximately 30 miles offshore, until he picked up the buoy and Wrigely Harbour, then to take that channel down to Providence. Then he would be on the MacKenzie River.

However there was a young fellow who had been with the Northern Transportation Company prior to the Hudson Bay and they had a schooner. They used to go straight across from Burnt Island to Wrigely Harbour. However, when I looked around, there was no land in sight and there was no wind, it was very quiet and calm, they were doing fine. So I said "Well you seem to be doing alright". He told me what had happened, that he was going to make a little better time that way. So after another hour or so we got a slight wind and the wind increased and the first thing we know we ran into a flow of ice moving down the middle of Great Slave Lake. It was moving very slowly, the current would take it into the MacKenzie and on down the MacKenzie. So I said "We're right on course?" He said "I'm sure of it". I said "Well if your sure of it you may as well keep right on. However the boats were mostly tunnel boats with propellers and we started getting ice into the tunnels so we had to cut the speed down and we had to get a crew out with poles pushing ice out of the road and I think it was about two miles across this flow of ice but by the time we got through this ice the wind had got quite strong and the waves were getting fairly high and the captain with his field glasses picked up sight of land to the right of his present course and it looked just exactly like the entrance into Wrigely Harbour. He asked me what I thought and I told him I didn't know. So he got hold of this young fellow and he told him it was Wrigely Harbour - that he must have somehow in the wind got off course.

So he swung to the right and headed in past the island like we would have done at Wrigely Harbour but shortly afterwards we run into low water and stones and stuff, bent the propeller and shaft. Lucky I had put an extra shaft and propeller on this particular boat. So then he decided that we were lost....so we started up the little rapid boats and we got up to an island where the boat I was on we had a little block and tackle. We managed to pull it up onto the shore and pry it up so that the propeller and the strut and the shaft were up above the water level which meant you had to take off your clothes, go in the water under the boat and see what the trouble was.

So we found that the babbitt in the strut had been completely knocked out. So we had to change the shaft and the propeller but we also had to run new babbitt and that is called the strut. The strut is where the shaft goes through and the propeller in on behind it. There was no one there, even myself, who had had much to do with running babbitt bearings although I had had some experience. I was very lucky when leaving Ft. Smith that the man in charge, I forgot his name, had told me to go out in the blacksmith shop and look around and anything I could find that I might

need to take along. I found several bars of babbitt and I found a ladle, so I took them along, never thinking that I would use them but was sure lucky I did.

Repairing the strut  
shaft on our way to  
Wrigely Harbour



On this particular voyage I was lucky that I had got a job on the boats with myself and two boys from Edmonton which I knew very well. One of them was Benny Ayr who was later killed in the last war and the other was Doug Johnson who I believe is farming out at Flatbush someplace. Anyway they got on together and we got everything fixed up and so the captain says "Now, you go with this boy (who had been a mate and really was a captain from Vancouver) and one other boy. You take one of the rapid boats and go out into the lake and you go to your right. You travel exactly two hours, no more, no less. If you don't find anything, you come back and report to me". Mind you we have no radios, no means of communication whatsoever and airplanes were only getting started in that country so you couldn't look for them. However, we travelled the two hours and we set our watches with the captain's and this mate or captain that was supposed to be in charge along with me, I told him "Our two hours is up. What do we do now?" He says, "Well, I don't know. We're supposed to go back. He told us to go back but I think we should go on till we find something. There's no point in going back". So myself and the other party with us agreed that we should go on.

Anyway we went on and we travelled and finally we came to where there was a cabin and a couple of canoes up out of the water and we swung around and we went in there and we went up to the cabin. But nobody would answer the door. We hollered and yelled and done everything. Well then I took notice that the door was fastened from the inside so I took the boys with me and we walked up a couple of hundred yards or so and I told them what I thought.

I said "I'm sure there's somebody inside but he's afraid of us. He's afraid we're there to rob him or something. You guys stay here and I'm going go go back and see if I can't get him to open the door". So I went back a little ways and then I hollered back to the boys "I'm going back and tell this man who we are and why we're here". So I went off about fifty yards more and hollered back to these boys that I was going to tell this man who we were - that we were with the Hudson Bay Company and we were lost and so forth. They stayed away off and sure enough we were lucky. The man opened the door just a little bit, just enough to talk to me. So I told him the story and asked him where we were and he told me that where we went was into Sulphur Bay, 30 miles off course. Now the captain had been right on course. Had he not listened to this other young fellow he would have went to Wrigely Harbour without any trouble. However, he was scared on account of the winds and waves and he had turned off course. However, we had gone against he orders but we had found out where we were. So away back we went and we were happy and recorded what the story was. He was pretty mad but he couldn't say nothing because we had found out where we were by going against his wishes. So from there on everything went fine and we got to Ft. Norman without any further troubles.

Well, talking about Great Slave Lake in 1919, I should tell you about the first trip with the Distributor. As I said before, the Distributor was not completed. The Pilot House was not completed, and many things were not completed. And we started out from Ft. Resolution at night or shortly after dark and travelling by compass we ended going the wrong way for some reason or other the compass on the Distributor was wrong and effected by the minerals in the district. We we turned completely around and were headed back toward Resolution. Also, we had run out of wood and the waves were getting quite high and there was a piano up in the upper deck. If the boat was rolling, the piano would slide from one side to the other of the saloon. This was a fairly large sitting saloon for the passengers. It just so happened everybody was out on deck

looking at the waves and what was happening and I noticed this piano was rolling back and forth, back and forth. I let out a yell and pounded on the windows and several of the passengers and crew came in and caught the piano and we finally got ropes and stuff and tied it down so it couldn't move around. Otherwise it would have went smashing out through the wall and into the lake.

However, we run out of wood. We took boxes off of everything we could find, any papers, anything. We even burnt slabs of bacon. We finally got back to Burnt Island where the crew was able to cut wood to get us back to Wrigely Harbour. That was our first experience on Great Slave Lake with the S.S. Distributor.

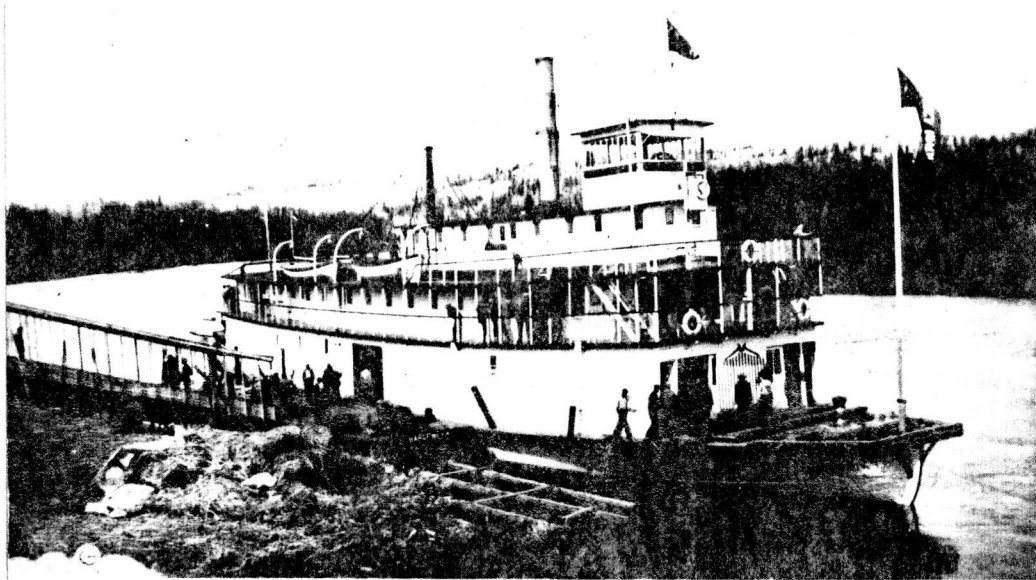
I missed part of the Slave River steamboat. I believe it was on my second time I went north, I'm not too sure now. Yes, I'm almost positive it was. Anyway we had left just ahead of the Athabasca River from Ft. McMurray and got down to Athabasca Lake where you have to tie up and send out a small boat and men with poles and flags and drive them in the edge of the channel to find the channel out into the lake. Secondly, the wind was blowing quite strong. Too strong to take the sternwheeler out into the lake. But during the night the wind went down and we were closer to the lake than the Athabasca River who was tied a few yards further up the Athabasca River than we were. So the captain - without any noise, no whistle, and with as little noise as possible - got us all up and told us the story. So we merely pulled in our ropes and cables and gangplank (not making any noise) and let the boat drift down the Athabasca a ways in the current. Then when he thought we were far enough away from the Athabasca River Steamboat we started using a little power and got things straightened out and at that time were able to see the flags for the channel which the boys had staked out. The whole idea was that we had lots of fresh fruit and so forth on the boat and the first boat into Ft. Fitzgerald was somehow considered to be quite an event.

However, we ran out of wood shortly after leaving Ft. Chipewyan and we stopped and loaded on a bunch of Hudson Bay Wood. The boat belonged to Lambson Hubbard (the old Slave River steamboat) so in a sense we were stealing the wood.

Pretty soon we could see the smoke stack of the Athabasca River coming and the captain wanted to be first into Ft. Fitzgerald so we cut loose and took off. When we got to the Slave River and you are about 30 miles or so above Fitzgerald there is a rapids of which there's a ledge runs right across the river but by going in behind an island there's another small river joins the Slave River at this point but you have to go ahead and back up in order to get out of there and into the Slave River.

So at this point, this is where Captain Haight came in - unbelievable - we barely got turned around and started heading out into the Slave River and, lo & behold, here comes the Athabasca River right out over the falls. It's bow went down under the water and it went steaming on. Being a much faster boat than the old Slave River, of course they got into Fitzgerald ahead of us. But I notice in some of the literature that Captain Haight I don't believe was ever given the praise for some of the things that he did up north. I think that there's far more credit due to Captain Haight, Captain Mills and Joe Bird than has ever come to light. At least that's my opinion.





LAST OF THE H.B.C. STEAMBOATS 'S.S. ATHABASCA RIVER' 1923-1943

HILL PHOTO BY G. STRANDBERG, FORT MCMURRAY

There's another instance that I had forgot about at Vermillion Chutes and here myself and Tiny Gifford came into play again. It was normal to get Indian boys to take the canoes down over Vermillion Chutes. And this day Tiny and I were standing on the shore and here comes a canoe but it was upset and two boys were holding onto the canoe going down the Peace River which runs quite fast below the chutes and quite a ways off shore. But there was a bunch of canoes there on the barge, so Tiny and I grabbed a canoe and paddles. I thought that Tiny was coming with me so I got right out into the nose or the bow of the canoe with one paddle because I thought he was getting in the back. But instead of that he give the canoe a shove and of course one end of the canoe went way up in the air and went whirling around. In any case, I found myself alone and I took off.

As soon as this one fellow saw me coming with a canoe, he let go of the boat he was holding onto drifting down the river and started to swim towards me. I had quite a job. I had to threaten him with hitting him with the paddle in order to keep him from climbing in. I finally got him to get a hold of the nose of the canoe and I paddled back to shore where he was able to wade to shore. In the meantime Tiny had got another canoe in the water and taken off down the Peace River and picked up the other boy who was still holding onto the canoe and also brought the upside down boat back to shore.

There's one or two things that I've missed that I think I should mention. In the 30's when I went back up north I was on the S.S. Distributor and we landed at the Ft. Norman oilwells. While they were unloading there I went for a walk back in the bush about two miles where I had previously unloaded a drilling rig in the early days - in the boom days (1919 - 20 - 21).

To give you some idea what it is like, this drilling rig was about the same size as we use nowadays for drilling water wells. It was all steel wheels and quite heavy and as I was second mate on the Distributor at that time, it was my job unloading the drilling rig. So I went ashore, put cables around a bunch of willows and poplar and stuff along the shore. Put two gangplanks down and took the drilling rig down. Everything went fine until it hit the shore. Of course the shore was muddy and soft but all rocks and gravel. But still the drilling rig sank down into this muck. So I was watching as we had put a pulley on shore and run a cable to the rig and back to the steam capstan on the boat to pull the rig up above the water line.

I was watching this steam capstan and it was going right but the drilling rig wasn't moving. So I looked up only to find that all the willows and poplars, all the dirt and everything was all sliding down but the drilling rig was standing still. Well all there was was about 8 or 10 inches of dirt and under that was permafrost frozen hard. So we had to get axes and picks, mostly axes or shovels, and we had to dig a trench into the frozen dirt and make what is called a deadman, that is we had to put a timber down in this hole with a runway cut out towards the boat so as the cable won't pull the deadman out of the hole. That way we got this machine up on the shore and above the water and ice line which was the end of our responsibility.

Now that was about 1922 I believe. And I went back about 1932 or 1933 and when I went back for a walk up there, here was this machine still sitting right where I left it.



Rapid boats entroute from  
Ft. Smith to Bear River  
Rapids - Ft. Norman

I think I should tell you a little bit about Great Bear Lake and the Liard River tugboat.

First we will talk about Bear River itself. You can go up about 50 miles to the rapids in Great Bear River where we had a camp. Here we took all the freight and put it into rapid boats - about two tons at a time - and took it up through the rapids and the fast water where it could be picked up by larger boats above the rapids. On one of these trips from Ft. Norman up to the rapids we usually hauled around 20 ton of freight pushing a small barge ahead of a smaller tug.

On this particular trip Superintendent Davis had come down to the Bear River which was a couple of miles or so west of Ft. Norman where we kept the boat and told me that the Distributor was coming in the next day and that if Jimmy the pilot knew about it he wouldn't leave Ft. Norman until after the Distributor had come and gone and that would be several days as his family was at Ft. Norman at that time. So he asked me to go, take the boat up to the rapids, unload it and bring it back without letting Jimmy the pilot know. This I did.

So we started off and everything went fine till we got up just below the rapids at the first obstacle where there was very shallow water but there is a deep channel out in the middle of the Bear River. But where this channel is there is also a large stone, probably 30 or 40 feet in diameter and sticking out of the water. The water hits this stone and glances off and creates deep water on the left hand side of it and also a deep eddy below it. So in order to get up over this ledge you come up, hit the eddy, you get speed up, you just go past on the left hand side of this boulder. You have enough speed to get you up past this big stone and over the ledge and into the deeper water above.

However there are always stones rolling in the channel and this particular time we were loaded pretty heavy. We had a bunch of drill steel and various heavy things on board and I didn't know myself that this scow was quite old. No one had ever told me and I had never thought about it. However there was just the pilot, myself and one man who was going up as a purser to check the freight up through the rapids and so forth. So we were doing fine till we went past the stone. We got up over the hump and into the deep water and we should have kept on the left hand side in the channel. However, there had been a rolling boulder that had got into the channel and our barge or scow hit this and poked a big hole in it - in the bow of it.

The pilot, Jimmy, I could not get him to swing to shallow water because he knew we would go aground but also it was our only chance to save anything. So on our right hand side it was very shallow as you could see with lots of sandbars, etc. I tried to get Jimmy to swing to the right and take it into the shallow water and he wouldn't do it. So I took the wheel out of his hands and steered it myself and run it up into the shallow water as far as it would go until it finally run absolutely aground. Here we were about a mile and a half below our camp at the foot of the rapids. There the boys saw we were in trouble so they came down with the rapid boats and we unloaded everything onto the rapid boats. But as we unloaded of course the barge became lighter and the force of the water was trying to shove us, boat and all, back down over the rocks. So we had to keep the motor running all of the time and keep the barge headed upstream.

So I got the boys at the rapids - we had some cable up at the rapids - they brought it down and we hooked it onto the barge and with the rapid boats they took it ashore about a quarter of a mile and made it fast into some rocks and tied it onto the barge. So when we finally unloaded the barge we didn't loose one thing. Even some loose picks that were laying on the deck we managed to save and the drill steel which was worth quite a bit of money. We saved all this but there was nothing we could do with the barge so with the cable on it we unhooked the boat and dropped back and let the barge swing ashore into shallow water, which it did. Then we went back to Ft. Norman

#### Bear River July 6, 1934

Rapid boats take 1/4 mile of cable to other side and use it to ferry boat across. Then back to other side.

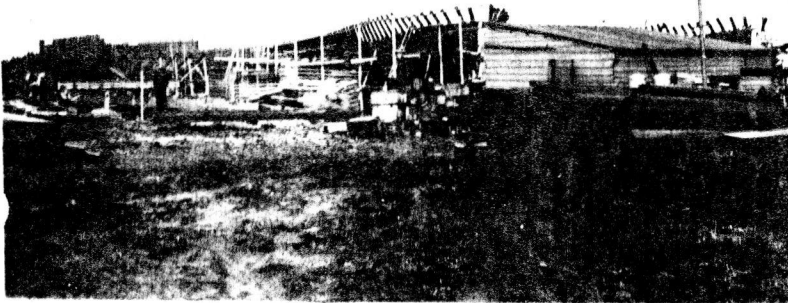


Pelly Lake on right  
& Liard River on left.  
Loading freight at Ft.  
Smith.



and I reported to Davis what had happened. I thought he would be quite upset but he wasn't. He said "Oh well," he said "That's good. I've been trying to get rid of that barge for a long time". So there we left it and never did go back to get it.

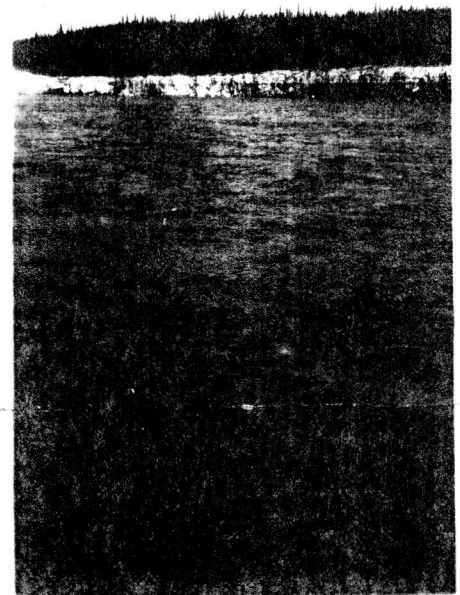
However we took a tugboat, Liard River, and I believe two barges and we took it up through all these rapids of which there is rapids all the way up to Great Bear Lake above what is called Bear River Rapids. There's falls and all kinds of obstacles and a lot of bends. I don't remember exactly but I ended up anyway on the Liard River and on Great Bear Lake. Here we had the same pilot, Jimmy. In the meantime Jimmy's family had gone up to Franklin. I don't know whether they were flown up from Norman or what. Perhaps the Bay flew his family up to Ft. Franklin which was just across four or five miles from the mouth of the Bear River where the Lake emptied out. This is where the freight had been piled up there. Also planes were hauling freight from Norman up and dumping it off at Ft. Franklin cache.



Hearn Lake  
Dease Lake  
Pelly Lake  
Under construction at Ft. Smith



Unloading freight and  
loading freight at  
Eldorado mine



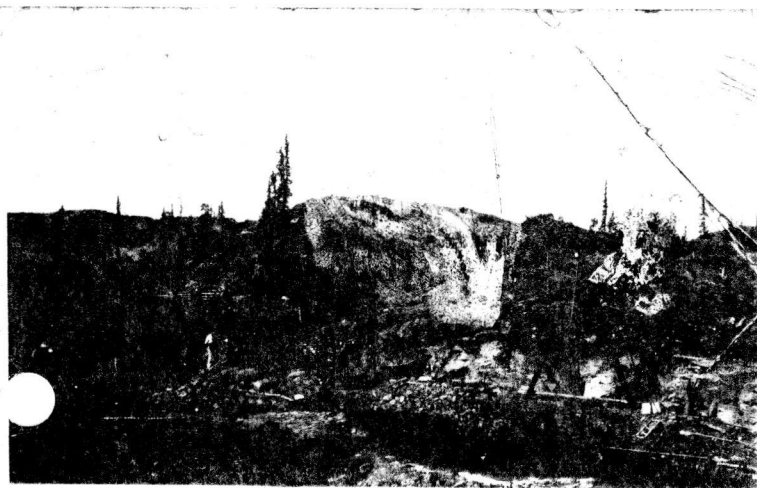
July 6 - ice along  
the shore of Great Bear  
River

At this particular time we had Colonel Reed's son as purser on the Liard. The pursers job is to keep track of the freight and collect costs, get it signed for and keep track of it and so forth. However, we had to reload as we had taken the barges up empty. I might explain that you can't just take the barges and go up. You have to run out cables and have capstans on the barges. Capstans, which are winches so to speak, are operated by gasoline motors or steam. You have to take a small boat like a rapids boat and run your cable out and up the shore and make it fast to something or put in a deadman. Then you have to line up these barges and boats. The water is too fast and quite shallow. Two or three places it is just a straight falls - just a channel on one side or the other where you can go up. But you have to have the help of a cable and winch in order to get up through these places.

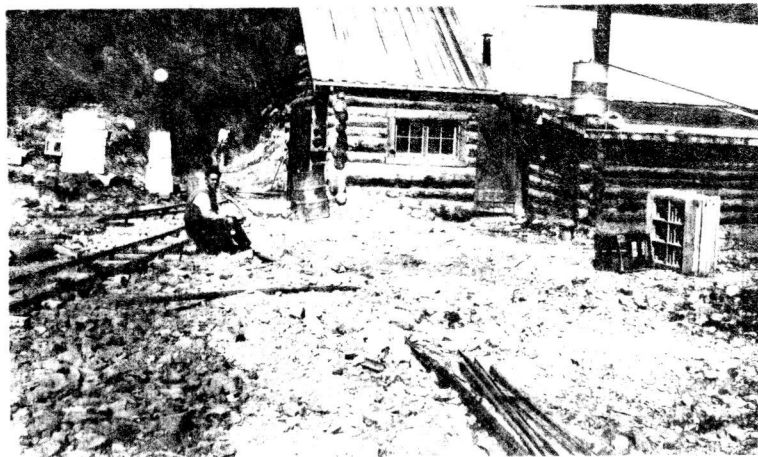
We were a little unlucky because for some reason or other the pilot and the captain got mixed up and rang the wrong signals. When they should have rang a signal for slow or something, they rang a signal for full speed ahead. So we shoved one of the barges right up into the rocks. However we got that fixed and we got up to Ft. Franklin.

But in the meantime we had a few passengers at Ft. Franklin to go across to what was then known as Eldorado, that is the LaBine's mine on Great Bear Lake. Here Jimmy wanted to go and visit his family over at Ft. Franklin which meant taking a small boat and an outboard motor to go and see them. At this point, I apparently was sleeping so the captain came and got me out of bed and told me that the purser, Colonel Reed's son, wanted to charge Jimmy for taking the boat and going over to Ft. Franklin and of course Jimmy wouldn't hear to it so he quit. So there we were with no pilot. The captain came and told me this.

Then the captain got everybody else away and out of sight and I got up and went to talk to Jimmy. So I told him that he had misunderstood that he wanted to charge him - that he was merely wanting to tell him what it was going to cost. Anyway I convinced Jimmy and I got him into the boat, the motor in it, put some gas in it and some gas to come back with and I got him on his way and got Jimmy to come back on the boat afterwards. This was all fine. We made several trips across and I don't know if it was that year or the next year, in any case we had quite a storm going over and if you look at Bear Lake you will see that there is a kind of a cross-ways and there's kind of a large body of water that you have to cross at one time and there's no way to get out of it. However we got across there and through all the waves and stuff and we held onto the shore on the left hand side that the wind was coming off shore. A very nice day but the wind was blowing. Here again the pilot went to sleep at the wheel and we ran ashore on a sandbar but there was no damage done so we backed off and got going again but by the time we got through



Radium ore sacked for  
shipping. Air vent  
at LaBine's mine



Eldorado mine  
Blacksmith shop

with all this we still had to cross Great Bear Lake to LaBine's mine known as Eldorado at that time and with great big rocks, and rock islands, etc.

I'll do my best to remember the captain's name. However, I do know he was a new captain but he sure knew his business. We had to cross Great Bear Lake in the dark with waves somewhere between 20 and 30 feet high with a flat bottom tow boat pulling two barges behind us and each on an 80 foot tow rope and all we had to go on was a compass. There was no bouys or nothing. Well, you can imagine how scared I was and I believe also that the captain was scared. But all I can remember about the captain was that his Mother owned the Queen's Hotel in Edmonton and I'm going to find out what his name was and try to give it to my daughter when she types this out.

However, first we saw what was just like a candle light. And then it got a little bigger and we kept looking at this light with glasses. First we thought it was a star and it kept getting bigger so we decided it was something else. And he says "Here, Oscar, take the glasses", and he says "that's some kind of a light". So I did and we could see the flames moving. Something was different because it would get big and then small and I said "Yes, it is". So he took another look and he says "Somebody has made a beacon out there". So, sure enough, as we got closer Gilbert LaBine knew we were coming and he put a bunch of trees, I guess it would be about 30 feet high, and he put them up like a tepee with a fire up in the peak of them and this was the light we saw and, believe you me, that was some relief!! You must remember there was no radio and no means of communication at this time.

However, we got there, unloaded and that and started back. In the meantime the wind had changed around and was coming from the east. So we took the other shore on the way back but were practically running empty outside of some pitchblend concentrates that we had loaded on but very little of a load.

We came through a storm. This was our last trip. We had taken what is known as the power barge along. But the waves were so bad that we had to cut the power barge loose and send him on by himself. Well as that was a riverboat and had two tanks, one on each side, 250 gallons each, there had been accumulation of rust and water and stuff in these tanks. The rough water loosened it and they were having a lot of trouble. They didn't have a flashlight nor anything - nothing at all. No life preservers, boats nor anything on this barge which was canvas top. So we lost them in the dark but we left the light on. As our generator wasn't putting out very much, we would put the light out once in awhile but we put it on anyway and they came up along side and said they were having trouble but they could make it if they had some kind of light - a flashlight, anything! So we gave them a lantern and a flashlight. Everybody was asleep except the pilot, the captain and myself. I had gone on deck and pulled the rope in and the man had to jump.

When the barge was up in the air above our boat he had to jump down onto our boat. Then he had to wait till our boat was up and his barge was down and then he jumped back. Well he only had about 18 inches of a walkway around his barge. So he lit on it alright but went into the canvas top of course but didn't get hurt. Anyway he had a flashlight and a lantern and some candles, etc. Well, that was all fine but the guy running the barge and the pilot on our boat both decided it was time to cut loose. In the meantime ice is freezing on the deck and I pulled this rope all up at my feet and wrapped it around a snub post, holding it there, and as soon as I undone it each one of them swung their boats away from one another. And here I am dancing in the dark with this rope snakeing out under my feet! You wouldn't live more than 5 or 10 minutes at the most if you got into that water because it is ice cold even in the warmest weather. You can't drink it down - it's that cold.



However we got through it all and we were just coming into Franklin Bay on our way back and out comes I believe it was Vic Ingram with a schooner and one or two scows in tow. Now the schooner was a lake boat but the scows were not, they were just ordinary scows. Anyway we went as close as we dare and the captain hollered over with his megaphone and told him to "Go back". We all motioned for him to "Go Back" but in Franklin Bay there was no wind and there was no waves, so I guess they didn't know what we were talking about and there was no other means of communication. They didn't go back. They went on and the engine somehow caught fire and the two boys were drowned and they lost the barge and Vic Ingram (I believe his name was Vic Ingram) was found about two weeks later on a sandbar partly frozen. I never met him afterwards but believe he lost some or part of his feet or something or other. However he was alive but these two boys were drowned in the Lake.

As I said before, we had some passengers and it was necessary to have an engineer that was licensed to carry passengers. So they sent up a steam engineer who knew absolutely nothing about gasoline boats. So he said "Oscar, you do the chief's work and I'll do your work". I said "That's okay with me". "But" he said "Okay, but I'm going to keep my own pay". I said "That's okay".

But anyway it came to taking the boat back down the river and we started out. Everybody had sat down for breakfast and the Bear River makes quite fast water and its just like glass going down the hill. So he says "I'll take over". I might mention also that the other engineer before was also a steam engineer and he quit and went out by plane and they flew this one Bill Malcolm in who was a steam engineer and who I knew. He says "I'll take over now". I said "Okay". We all went in to have breakfast and they started down the river and on the river boats you have to be very fast and you don't stop like with a steam engine. They rang for reverse. Well Bill thought he was doing right. He slowed the engine down, pushed it into reverse and opened the engine up. But by the time he had done this the boat hit the bank and there was a big spruce tree comes sailing right through! Right over the table! However that held us there. So they had to get out and saw this off before we could move. Anyway Bill comes up "Finished. I'll have nothing more to do with it". So I took over again. But you merely stand there and when they ring for reverse you throw it into reverse. You don't even try to slow the engine down because the water is very fast. Its in a matter of seconds things happen.

Anyway, we got down to the main rapid part without any serious things going wrong but on the last stage there is a couple of miles of very shallow water and lots of boulders. Here we had to cross from the left to right side, about one quarter of a mile. There was a boulder got in and hit the propeller and stalled the engine. The thing had been set up wrong on the throttle and the spark and when you reached to crank the motor, which you had to crank it with a bar, you reached right over top of the spark advance. Having a coat on, my sleeve caught the spark advance. Although I had retarded it, I caught it and shoved it ahead and when I cranked the motor of course it fired and the bar went sailing around the cabin inside the engine room! I finally found it and got the engine going just in time or we would have gone right down over the rocks and everything sideways. So we got through that part with no more trouble. All that was said was the skipper said to Bill Malcolm, the other engineer "I thought engineers belonged in the engine room". And that was the end of that! He was away out front on the barge 200 feet from the engine room.

The fireman seemed to have trouble in the fast water in the Ramparts. While though I was the mate on it, they would get ahold of me and get me to fire it up through the rapids in order to keep up steam. I don't think it was so much my ability to keep up steam as it was that the engineers had faith in me and trusted me. There were bales of fur from one end of the boat to the other and to get to the boiler back to the engine room you had to go outside and hold onto a cable and walk along the outside of the boat. The engineer couldn't leave his engines and go up there and see what the fireman was doing. So if the fireman wanted to shut the water off to get up a little more steam and had plenty of water in the boiler, he would merely loosen the strap and put it in a hole on a nail above. That would shut the flow of water off into the boiler. But the engineer, being scared, would put it back where it was. Therefore the fireman couldn't get steam any higher than it was and kept losing steam. This is when they called me in. Whatever I did the engineer had faith in me from my experience on the boiler and wouldn't bother the strap that controlled the flow of water.

1934 On my final occasion they got me out of bed to fire this same boiler on the Distributor on Great Slave Lake as the fireman couldn't keep up steam. I had quit and was on the way out because the unions in Vancouver wouldn't let the men to go work up north unless they raised the wages. I had been hired by the commissioners in February and hired at the old rate and knew nothing about this until one of the men told me about it.

So I approached Colonel Reed who was General Manager and was on the Distributor at that time and told him the story. I was running from Ft. Norman to about the foot of the Bear Rapids at that time. Colonel Reed said that as I was hired by the commissioners, he couldn't do a thing about it but would recommend that they give me the same amount of money that the others were getting. However, I didn't believe him and I told him that I was quitting and going out. He was going to make me pay my way out and I had to go up on the promenade deck and eat in the dining room along with the passengers and also to have a state room. But I didn't do that. I made arrangements with the second mate and while he was on duty I slept in his cabin and I ate down below with the deck hands and the crew. However the mate came and got me out of bed and said they were in trouble and the engineer wanted me right away. So I went down and took over the firing of the boiler and got steam back up and we got across Great Slave Lake safely.

I didn't know that Colonel Reed had come down and was watching me fire the boiler till the engineer told me next day. As far as he knew I had saved his life plus all the other people and crew.

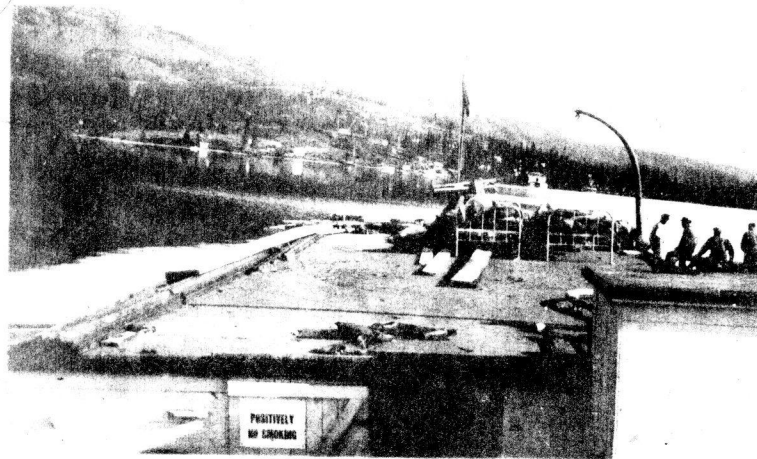
When we got back to Waterways we had to get off the boat, go and stay overnight in a hotel to get on the train next morning to go back to Edmonton. I had supper there and I had breakfast and I went to see the clerk and ask him how much I owed. But I had to go and collect my wages before I could pay it. He said "It has all been paid". So I started out to go over to the office and I met the accountant, I forgot his name but he was a redheaded fellow. I think his name was McKay or something like that. However he said "Green, we have a wire here that the Company wants to hire you on a year round basis and wants you to go back to Ft. Norman on the job you were on".

But, being a home loving boy, there was just no way I wanted to go back. I wanted to go home and I did. I came home.



Marooned behind the ice on Great Slave Lake. Back row, left to right - Oscar Green, engineer, Dr. Gilchrest, University of Alberta, Edmonton. Front row, Dentist from Ft. Saskatchewan, deck hand, cook, Slim Baines, pilot, Captain Nyler, Colonel Reed, General Manager, and son.

Liard River and barge going into Cameron Bay on Great Bear Lake



Cameron Bay on Great Bear Lake



I am putting a lot of happenings here together and some of them might be in the later or the earlier years.

Away back in the first part of going up north when we had stolen wood from the Hudson Bay Company and were trying to beat them to Fitzgerald, I forgot to mention that the engineer had screwed the safety valves down allowing more pressure to get to the engines and therefore to go a little bit faster. But as soon as Captain Haight went over the falls and ahead of us, the engineer put them back where they belonged, or at least where he had had them previous.

Also, I believe it was in 1932 we had come back to the Liard River from Ft. Norman all the way back to the ship yards below Ft. Smith. As we came in there at night we pulled ashore and left the barge at the ship yards and took off for Ft. Smith. That night we had quite a storm which was a snow storm and heavy winds. We went back to the shipyards the next day and our barge was missing and couldn't be found. We figured that they would naturally go with the current downstream so we took off looking for it. I believe we went 40 or 50 miles downstream. We couldn't find any trace of our barge. Finally the captain decided to come back. So we came back and coming upstream the snow had thawed a little bit as it was raining at the time and the skipper with his glasses thought he saw a corner of the barge which was directly across from the shipyards. As we got closer we knew it was the barge.

The wind had been that strong and blown the barges directly across from the shipyards against the current and had blown them over to the west side of the river where there was a kind of an eddy and they got into this eddy and some willows or trees or something with snow on them and couldn't be seen. However we were sure glad to find the barge. Somehow or other in the dark whoever tied the barge to the shore must have tied it onto something that came loose when the barge was lifting and pulling with the wind blowing and pulled loose and drifted straight across against the current. No one would ever think of that happening.

This part was on Great Bear Lake when we were in a very bad storm which I described beforehand. Everybody was sick and they had always been kidding me because I had always been one of the first to get sea sick, but I never got very seriously sick. However the new engineer, Bill Malcolm, and the cook particularly had lots of fun kidding me about getting sick. So now they got sick and I wasn't too bad. I was able to manouver and do whatever I was supposed to do. Bill Malcolm, the engineer, who had come up to help me and replace the other engineer who had quit and gone out got very sick and couldn't do anything at all. The cook also stayed in bed and wouldn't get out of bed. So there was the pilot, the captain and myself the only ones that were up and around in the middle of Great Bear Lake. So the captain asked me if I knew anything about cooking. I said "No, I don't know very much but I can fry bacon and eggs". He says "Well, go to it". So I built a fire and fried bacon and eggs and we all had a bite to eat. That's all I cooked was bacon and eggs and much to my surprise while I was doing that the skipper would tie the wheel for a minute or two, run down into the galley and put some stuff together right quickly and he would go back to the wheel and come back again and do a little more several times. Then he came back and put something in a pan and put it in the oven and you know that he made some of the best cake that really I ever did taste! Where he learned to cook I don't know but he sure could cook. This is the captain that so far I can't remember his name. But we'll find out somehow. (Found out from writing the Hudson Bay Archives his name was Captain Nyler).

Now going back to when we were trapping. You remember I spoke about Tiny Gifford coming along and we went with him to Ft. Norman. Well prior to that as soon as the weather was clear, the ice had gone, the two Indian boys came over. Tuffy and I had trapped and shot what seemed to be about 200 muskrats. Now we didn't know what we were going to do with these muskrats. We didn't have any boards or stretchers nor any way to stretch them. But anyway these two boys came over and they visited for

awhile and asked us what we were going to do with the muskrats and we told them we didn't know. So they went home.

The next morning, early, over comes the whole family. However, we were still in bed and didn't know that the women had come along. But the men knocked on the door and got us up. So we got up, made a fire and made some breakfast and the men had breakfast with us and never said nothing at all but I had to go outside to get some wood and here was two women skinning muskrats to beat heck! And also a little boy and girl around 8 or 9 or 10 years old was out there with them. They would skin the muskrats and these children would finish them with small willows which they would bend and stretch the muskrats over the willows. Neither my partner who was part Indian nor myself - neither one - had ever seen that way of stretching muskrats and never thought of it. We didn't had any idea what to do with them.

However the two women would not come in to have anything to eat but they had something with them which they were eating as they worked. But they would skin those muskrats so fast you must couldn't believe it. They stayed right there until they were all done before they went home that night. Actually there isn't much night as the sun shines pretty well daylight around the clock.

It's surprising what you learn as you travel around the world. On this trip which I had spoke about previously on Great Bear Lake I learned two or three things that I am sure glad to know.

One of them was on the way over we started playing cards as we had done sometimes crossing the lake. There is really not much that you can do except read, so we played cards with a 50 cent limit. That is you couldn't bet more than 50 cents at a time so that nobody could lose all their money. However one of the passengers watched for awhile and then asked if he could set in. We said "Sure". So he sat down and it so happened that he set down between the captain and myself and we played for a few hands and the bidding would come round to me and I would probably call and raise the ante and he would be next and he would lay down, that is he would lay his hand down. The captain would likely call. Sometimes he would lay down. Most of the time he would call and sometimes raise again. This went on a couple of times.

So after we had played this hand out before we come to the end of it this fella says to me "After you fellas are through" he says "could I see your hand?" I says "Sure". So I showed him my hand. So he says "Okay, everything is honest". He says "If it hadn't of been I want to show you what I can do". So he took the cards and he says "I'm going to give you a spade flush (or whatever it is) I'm going to give you a spade or something. Anyway he would give us a hand. He would tell us ahead of time what kind of a hand he was going to give us. And you know, you could watch and be darned, you could cut the cards and do anything you like and he went right ahead and he dealt you the cards he said he was going to. Well that changed my idea of playing cards for money. And since that time I'm pretty careful before I ever get into a poker game. A lesson learned at no cost.

On this same trip on the return we had the same young fellas I believe it was that the captain had listened to on Great Slave Lake but I'm not sure. Anyway it was as I said before, really cold and freezing - ice freezing on the boat. The rest of us that were off shift had gone in and pulled the covers over us and had gone to bed in our bunks but there was a coleman (either kerosene or gas, I don't know which) and it was sitting right at my head or my feet - depending on which way I laid down, but between me and whoever was on the other side. There is only a few feet.

This young fella comes down and decided it was cold in there so he was going to light this stove. The rest of us were afraid to light it because we were not sure that

we understood it well enough. Remember that we were out in the middle of Great Bear Lake. Anyway he lit the stove and somehow the whole thing caught fire. I was just lying there and so was everybody else. Nobody really knew just what to do. We thought he would turn it off and it would go out or something. However the pilot saw the smoke coming up as we were down in the hole in front of the pilothouse and the smoke was coming out the sliding door. The pilot pushed the door back, jumped down the stairs into the hole, grabbed the blanket off of me, threw it on the stove, wrapped it entirely in the blanket and up the stairs he goes and throws it into the lake.

Now the pilot saved all of our lives because if he hadn't of done that within five minutes or so the whole boat would have been on fire. There would have been no time to get fire extinguishers or do anything because there was always a small amount of gas floating around in the water in the hole in the boat. Gas and oil and anything spilled would get down into the hole and be floating around in the water there. And if you got enough heat it would be just a matter of minutes till everything would be on fire. So this pilot saved all of our lives and we can be very thankful for that and I certainly learned a lesson what to do in case of fire happening like that. If there's a blanket handy to wrap up the fire and smother it.

Now you will notice that I spoke about engineers. Well when the first engineer came up who was supposed to be chief engineer and who said he would do my job if I would do his but he would keep his own pay - I'll tell you what happened to him.

He was kind of a show-off kind of a guy and he would like very much to talk to any officials who might be around who would listen if he could make himself look big or make the people think he was somebody that he wasn't. However this particular day we were filling up with gas which had to be pumped by hand from barrels into tanks on the boat. The tanks are hooked together and normally the gas runs across from one to another provided there's no rust or anything in the pipes that might plug them up. However, the one who was pumping the gas is supposed to keep constant watch and has a stick with markers on it with inches and knows how many inches should be in each tank on each side of the boat. However this particular day Colonel Reed and I believe some of the Commissioners from Winnipeg were coming in on a plane from Ft. Norman and landing at Franklin Bay.

The plane was just coming in and this engineer was standing there pumping away like heck. It so happened that I stayed up and didn't go to bed like I should have and was doing something in the engine room and I smelled gas. So I went outside and the gas was running all over the deck - that's the deck you walk on, your dining room and bunks and everything are below deck except for the pilot's house where the skipper sleeps - and here gas was running all around and the cook had the window open. I closed the window. He got mad and opened it again. I hollered and told him that there was gas there. He had a wood fire going there just a matter of inches away from where the gas was on the deck of the boat. I let out a yell and the guy quit pumping gas. He came over and saw what had happened, he walked off and never came back. He never told me he was leaving or nothing. He met the plane and said he was finished. Then he came back and picked up his suitcase and went out on the plane.



Engineer who pumped gas  
all over deck, Oscar Green  
and Slim Baines - Great  
Slave Lake



That's when they sent Bill Malcom up, the second engineer to help me. But poor Bill he was no better off because he knew absolutely nothing about gas but we did have a lot of fun with him and he's the one that tried to take the boat down through the fast water and where the tree came in the window on the side of the boat and he quit right there. He would have no more to do with it.

Well while being a trapper up north I seen people with sails, Indians sailing and what not and really thought there was not much to it. So I got a pole and put up, made a few rings and tied them together, fastened them onto part of our tent that we had torn up to make a sail. We had a little rope so we just pulled it up over top and let it go and it would fall down and it was fine. But neither one of us had had any experience with sails. But here I got mine!

We took this boat with a sail on it and I thought I would go across and use the sail to go across to where the Indians were about 4 or 5 miles across the Mackenzie River. So I got out and a little bit of wind blew and I was doing fine. I had to go up against the current to get around the upper part of the island and then there was another island farther. And when I cleared that island the wind seemed to be getting stronger all the time and the waves bigger. So I decided I better get rid of the sail and I let go of the rope, backed off, but the sail wouldn't drop down because the wind was strong enough that it held the rings against the mast that I had put up. There was no way to pull the sail down and the waves were that high and the sail flopping back and forth. I couldn't go up to the bow of the boat and pull it down by hand or the waves would have swamped me.

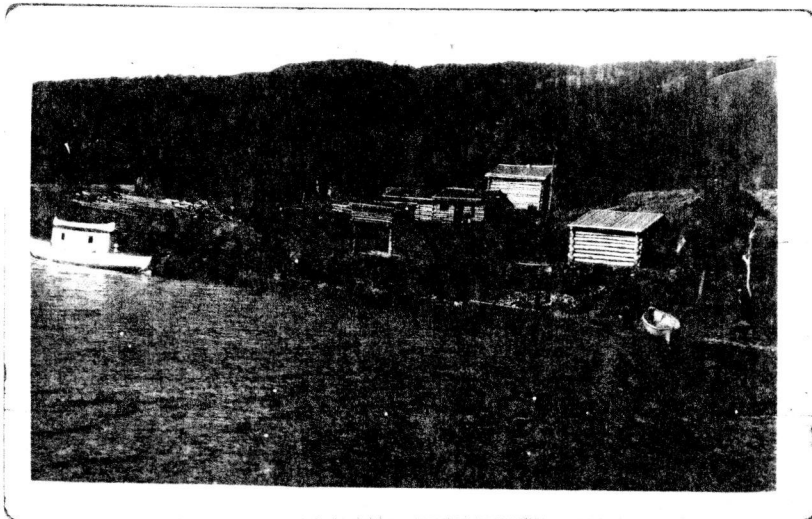
I kept heading to the west shore where the Indians lived. Pretty soon I saw the two boys coming out in a little birch bark canoe. I don't know what they would have done had I upset but I do know that they certainly gave me courage to keep on trying and I finally got to shore and I sure never used a sail after that!

Also at Ft. Norman at one time while unloading there we went for a walk back into the woods and came to this cookhouse which was built about 1920 (sometime along there) and this is now 1932 or 33. Mind you this was all built out of what is called whipsawed lumber. For those who don't understand what whipsaw is - you have a stand up around 7 or 8 feet high and you put a log up there and one man stays above it and one below it and they have similar to what used to be called a crosscut saw which is a long saw about 6 feet long and a handle on each end and a man up above and a man below and they saw down this log, sawing the log into boards and that's what they call whipsawed lumber.

This old cook house, the tables, the benches, everything there was built from whipsawed lumber including the floor and the roof. For windows they had cotton or linen or some kind of cloth over all the windows. That had been there for 10 years or more and though it was flopping in the wind and had holes in it and shredded and some of it shredded pretty bad, it was still there. On the tables was granite plates, saucers and cups, knives and forks, with the cups and plates turned upside down all ready for the next meal. Whether or not they ever had any meals there I don't know but there was a setting for about twenty people. All they had to do was get rid of the dust and put food on the plates.

I think this was probably our last trip of taking freight up because we sent the pilot on up the river and Slim Davis and myself brought the boat back down to Ft. Norman. However Slim came to me and he says "You think you can take the boat down? Pilot it down?" This boat had the controls in the pilot house so you could run the engine from the pilot house as well. I said "Well I think I can take it down as far as what they call the "fish camp" (there was a cabin there) "if you can take it the rest of the way". "Well" he says "You take it down there and I'll take it the rest of the way." So I started off and let me tell you it was pretty scary. I was fine to sit there or stand there and watch Jimmy take the boat down and see the rocks going by lickity split but when you got ahold of the wheel and were steering, it was another story altogether and it wasn't near as nice as I thought it would be.

However after a few close shaves and hitting the odd sandbar, I got down to the "fish camp" but Davis, he wasn't there. He was down in the hole. I says "Hey, come and take over, it's your turn". He says, "Oh no, your doing fine! Carry on". Boy now I was really scared because I really didn't pay any attention and I didn't know what I was doing.



Fish Camp

We kept on going and we didn't get into any serious trouble till we come down to within a mile of the mouth of the Bear River where it runs into the MacKenzie and there there was a falls which we always went up on the east side and then swung across. However coming down it wasn't necessary. But I hadn't paid that much attention to where Jimmy had been taking the boat downstream and I thought I was

doing about the same thing. But I didn't. I went over the falls and we went about 100 yards and run into a sandbar and, travelling as fast as we could, we got stuck pretty bad. But again we were very lucky. There were a couple of boys coming down in a canoe and they came down. So they came over the falls and tied the canoe on the boat and jumped into the water and started pushing and we run the engines and they would push and push and wiggle the boat until finally we got it moving and got it off the sandbar and out into the water. Thanks to these two boys. I don't know who they were, I never got their names. But being a pilot wasn't one of my accomplishments!

I spoke about losing the barge back away. Well that fall we got froze in at Ft. Smith. The plane came in to take us out but on the radio the next morning they told them to come back empty as ice was starting to run at Ft. McMurray. So he went off without us and we had to stay there till around Christmas time.

I just then went and asked my wife (by the way, we've only been married 62 years - not too bad ! I expect to live to be 105 and I expect her to live to be in her 90's, so I got a few years yet, we hope). However she says it was sometime in the first part of December when we flew out.

That was quite an experience. I will try to remember the pilot's name if I can. However, he came back and the only place he could land, (there was no airport of any description at that time around Ft. Smith) the only place he could land was what we called a snye which runs in behind an island below Ft. Smith. I don't remember for sure how far down this island is but I think it's possibly 3 or 4 miles or farther. However he had landed the plane there and said he would take us out as the river was all froze up by this time. He had landed on the ice in behind this island which was smooth as the ice didn't flow in there and get rough as it did out in the main channel.

So we got ready and they took all of our luggage and stuff on a horse and sleigh. We had to follow and walk down to where the aircraft was parked in this snye. Of course they had been there quite awhile before we were and had some kind of pots going - gas pots or oil pots or something and canvas over the motors to heat them up so they could get them running. However, I think this one had only one motor and it seems to me it was built out of tin. Anyway they got it warmed up and the pilot says "I'm overloaded. I should leave one of you here and your luggage. He says "Actually, I'm overloaded". Well he says "I guess we'll gamble". Well anyway he took off. I think his name was Stan McMullin but I'm not sure.

However, he took off and ahead of us he could see a few hundred yards ahead of us where the ice cut across the end where the ice is piled up there 10 or 12 feet high and here we are come sailing down, wide open and the plane still on the ice.

I had my back to it but I turned around so I could see anyway and so Stan, he takes it up a little bit into the air (probably 10 or 12 feet) and brings it down. Bumps it on the ice and bounces the plane up over the pile of ice at the end of the snye. You can't tell me that he didn't come close to heart failure right there because I did and I think everybody in the plane did!

However there was not a word spoken and there is a big mountain just west of Ft. Smith down the river. He headed for that mountain and he never stopped climbing until he was well above the mountain which I think is 5,000 feet. Anyway he kept



climbing and climbing and climbing and never turned right nor left and never said nothing. Finally after he got over this mountain and he started to turn around, then he started to talk and I guess he felt he could glide back to where he took off if he had to. However we never landed anymore until we got to Ft. McMurray and Waterways and we landed there in the snye. And believe you me, that's one airplane ride that I don't want anymore at all.



Clear water  
River

WATERWAYS, ALTA.

HILL PHOTO ©



FORT MCMURRAY, July 1922

HILL PHOTO ©

I hope you may find a few things that may help you as I have surely learned lots from my experience up north.

We had to stay in the hotel and wait for the train to come in the next day I believe it was. During the night a boy by the name of Wilf Cleader and I had paired off and taken the same room in the hotel and we were all on the same floor. We had left the door open about an inch or so and during the night, probably around 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, I myself woke up coughing. I opened my eyes and turned on the light and the smoke filled the room just above our heads like a cloud. I woke Wilf up and you couldn't straighten up because if you straightened up your head would be in the smoke and you'd really cough. So we got out into the hallway and thought we could see a light under a door and we started yelling and hollering. Wife found a fire extinguisher and it wouldn't go.

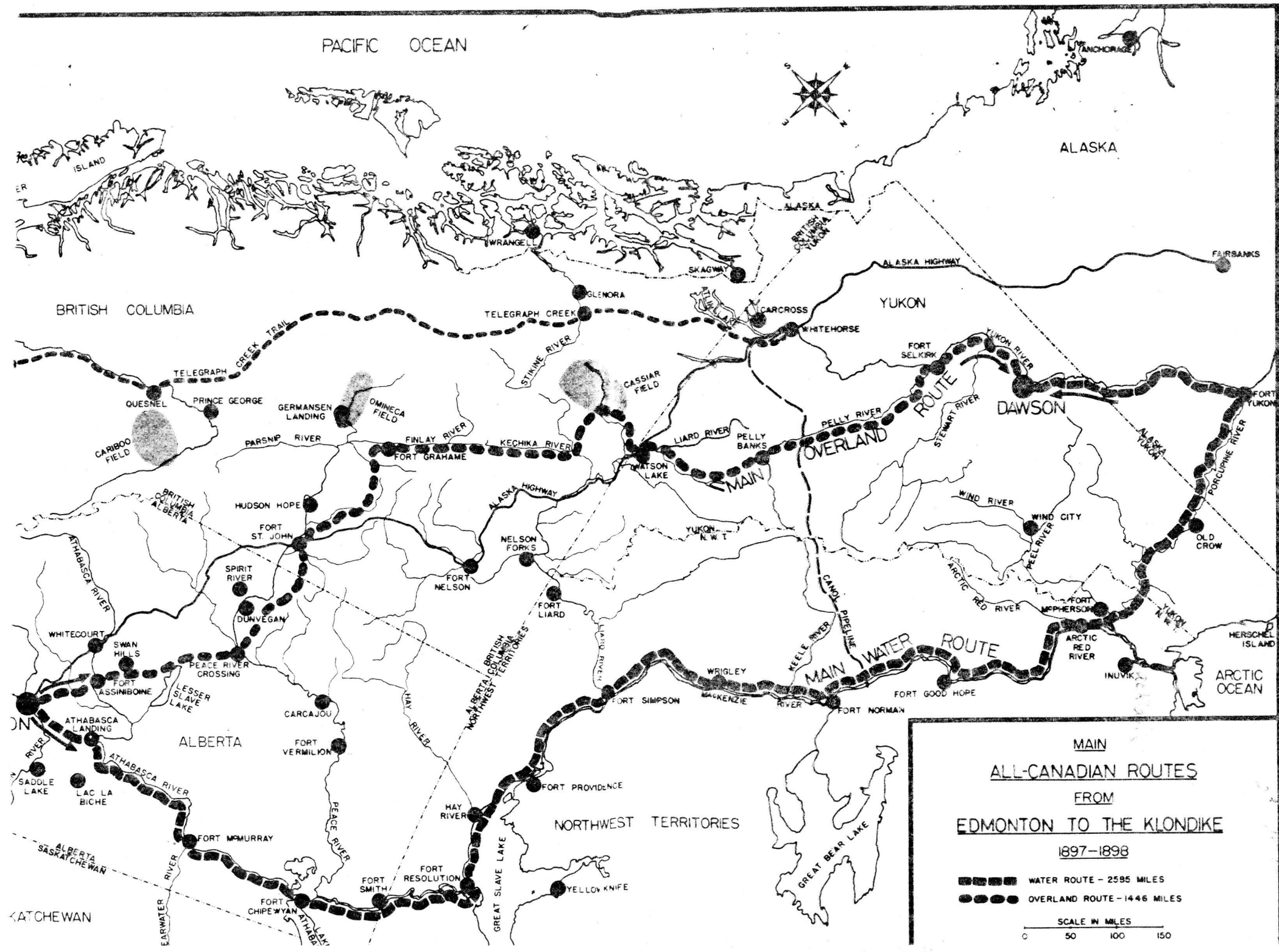
We hollered for the captain and all the rest of the crew and the doors started opening up and we got the light on and we opened the door into where the cook was sleeping and sure enough the cook had gone to bed smoking apparently as the bed was all on fire all around from about the middle of the bed all around the head of the bed and the side of the bed. About one-third of the bed was engulfed and burning. We couldn't get the fire extinguisher to work but Wilf knew a little bit about it so he gave it a bump on the floor. In doing so I think myself or someone was holding onto the hose. It broke off and he turned the fire extinguisher around and hit the cook smack in the face with it and he said "What's going on here"? When he opened his eyes he soon saw what was going on.

Whatever happened regarding the fire, I have no idea but I guess the captain and the cook must have gotten things fixed up somehow or another for we never heard anymore about it. But that's another thing I learned - not to room with anybody that smokes in bed. It's pretty dangerous. And for those of you who smoke in bed or smoke going to bed, think about it twice. I think you will find that is good advice.

While trapping down north I forgot to mention about my partner Tuffy Brazeau. We had gone to Good Hope, Ft. Good Hope that is, to get supplies. They had had a dance. Well he danced all night but I didn't. I slept at the post and was fresh the next day. Tuffy came in in the morning. So we had breakfast and took off. I asked him about changing clothes but he says "No, I'm okay, I'll put my parka on". However we got 5 miles or so and we come out into what was open ice. It was smooth and there was nothing stopping the wind blowing. And the wind came up and we normally would take turns about breaking trail for the dogs. You had small snowshoes on and you would go ahead for the dogs so they wouldn't sink down too deep.

So anyway he had been breaking trail so I went ahead on my turn and after awhile I looked back and he was trying to walk backwards on his snowshoes. I stopped and waited until he caught up and I asked him "What's the matter Tuffy"? He says "I'm n-n-n-n-n-n-nearly froze to death!" So we undone the carryall on the toboggan and I got a big Hudson Bay blanket out. We also had some quite large pins we used to use. We had seen them used to pin horse blankets on. We had some of these so we got the blanket wrapped around him and pinned it all up and let it hang down like a skirt.

We still had a couple of miles to go before we got to where we could go ashore, and even then it was a steep bank, straight up and down. You couldn't go anyplace. However there was one little spruce tree which was dead and dried about 50 feet on the bank. Of course snow had blown over and drifted down. So I took off my snowshoes and started climbing up this drift to get up to this tree,

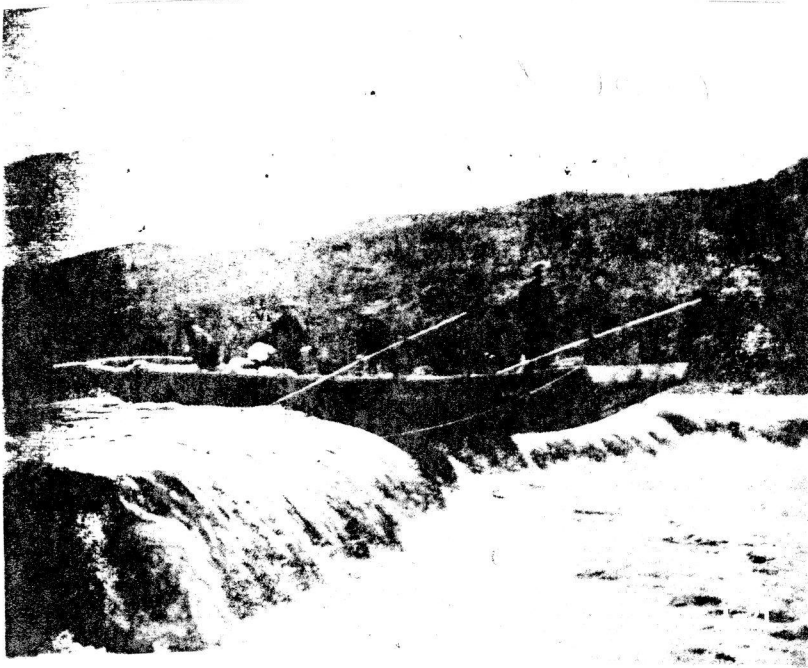




which I did. I broke it off and threw it down and broke up the branches a little bit and then tried to light a match but I couldn't hold the match. It would turn in my fingers. So I asked Tuffy to try and he couldn't hold it. So he says "I got an idea". So he put the match, which was the old wooden match which was about two inches long, and he put the end of this wooden match in his teeth and struck it on the edge of the little box which was like sandpaper and I grabbed it out of his mouth so it wouldn't burn his nose. And that's the way we got the fire started.

So if at any time it ever happens to you, you can't hold a match, what you can do is put it in your teeth, strike it on the box and get it lit. So that's another thing I learned and a good thing to remember anytime you are in the outdoors in the wintertime. Don't take matches that are paper matches. The stems on the matches are pressed paper and if they get wet or damp they won't light - they bend before you can light them. Be sure the matches have wooden stems and put them in a waterproof container, and be sure.

P.S. I was hired and started to work for Lanson Hubbard Company and also believe that Alberta and Artic Transportation which apparently had contracted with a Mr. Askew to build the S.S. Distributor and I was employed by them for a number of years untill Hudson Bay Company bought them out or took them over. I was away at least from 1925 until about 1932. When I went back the Hudson Bay Company was operating all of the boats and it was called MacKenzie River Transport.



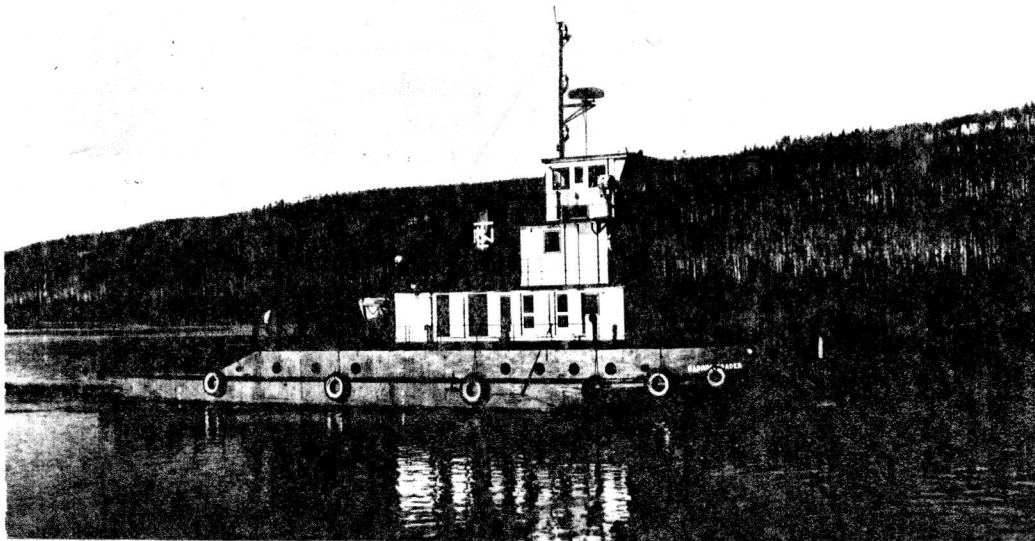
Cascade Rapids on Athabasca River. We went over this in the Slave River Steamboat.

The Slave River Steamboat piloted by Joe Bird & Captain Alexander went over the Cascade on May 23, 1919 after the Grand Rapids.

The Slave River is very similar to the picture by Hills Photo in this manuscript entitled the Echo. It is quite possible that this is the Slave River but if not, very similar.

On our way to Yellowknife the wind came up and blocked our route with ice and we had to get in behind a bunch of islands which were nothing more than acres of rock with a few trees here and there. We were there for 10 days to two weeks - I don't remember for sure. Myself and Dr. Gilchrest from the University of Alberta did a little prospecting which I finally got assayed the the Eldorado Mine by Gilbert LeBine.

The pilot and other wanted Mr. LeBine to tell us that it was something very good. Whether or not it was, he didn't want to. So he didn't. However he found that the sample we had taken from this island run about \$34.00 a ton in gold. He said he would fly me over while we unloaded next year and stake the claim. That was in 1933 - the last rip in the fall. In 1934 as I have said before, I left and came out and never got back so we could fly over and stake it. But I heard from others that Mr. LeBine waiting two years and I didn't show up. Then he flew someone over and they staked the cliam. Whether it was the same place I don't know for sure. This is all hearsay so you can't be sure of what happened.



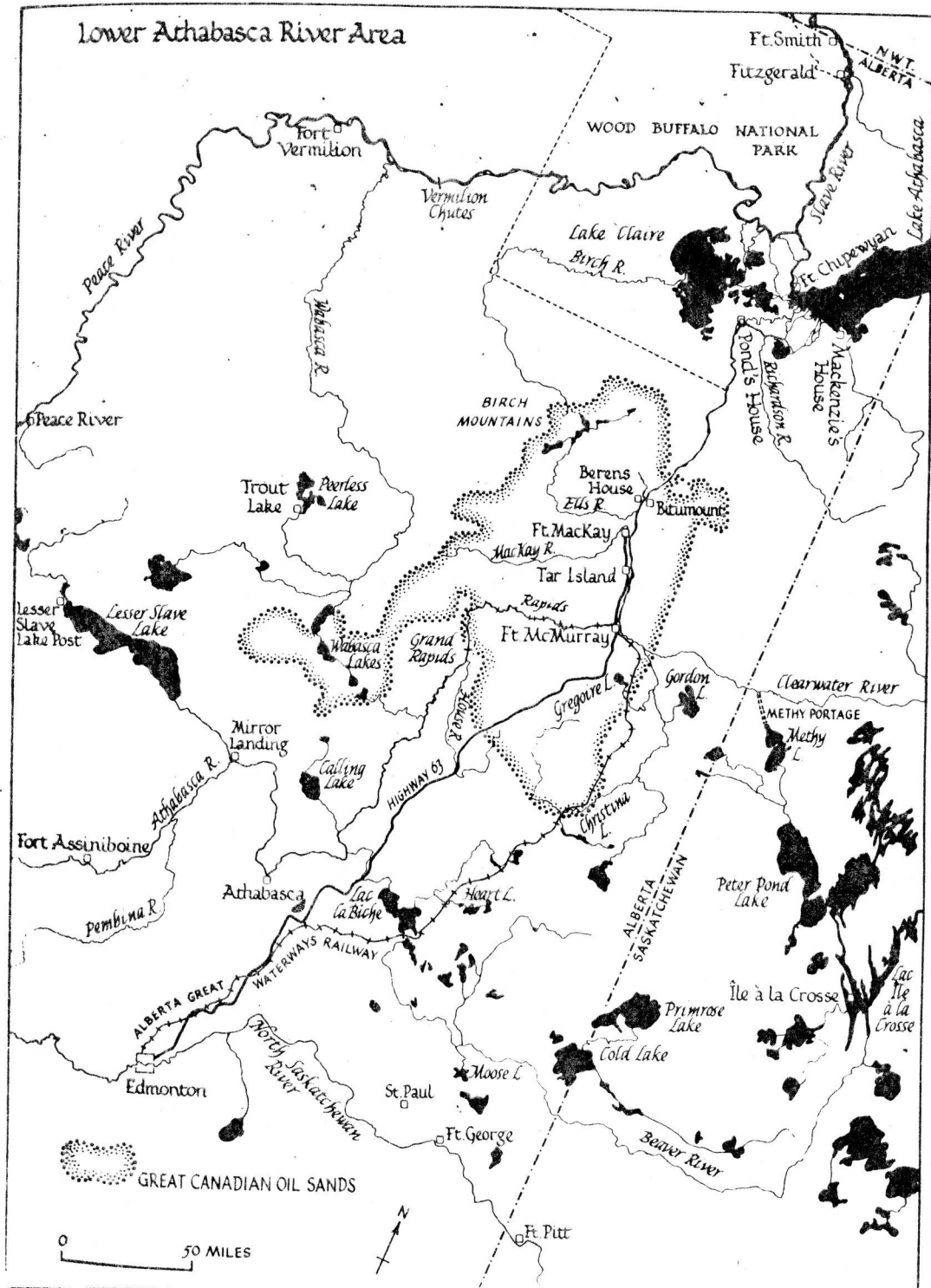
N.T.C.L. RADIUM TRADER

HILL PHOTO



N.T.C.L. SHIPYARDS AT FORT MCMURRAY, ALTA.

HILL P



There's a few things I have overlooked and one of them is the name of the man in charge of Hudson Bay warehouse at Ft. Smith. I believe his name was something like Williamson. He's the man who gave the Captain his orders and also told me to look around and see if there was anything that I would like to take along when going down to Ft. Norman.

I believe I have told you everything about going on the trip to Ft. Norman except that between Wrigely and Ft. Simpson when we had been sent down the year before we shot a moose on the shore (I believe the Lady McWorth was the boat that was taken and put back in the water and took us across Great Slave Lake and down to Ft. Norman). After leaving the Ft. Norman oilwells I explained most of it except just above Ft. Good Hope there's what is known as the Ramparts. The Mackenzie River just above the Ramparts is quite wide and it narrows down and there is a rock wall on each side approximately 30 - 50 feet high and this is where the water rushes through. I told a little bit about it going back up with the Distributor in the fall. Water is low in the fall and you have to go over kind of a falls in the Ramparts and this is where they have trouble keeping up steam to get over top of this falls. On two different occasions they called on me to fire the boiler to keep up steam and get sufficient steam in order for the Distributor to get up over this falls. After we were over the falls we managed okay except sometimes on Great Slave Lake we would run into the same trouble.

On the lake it was partly because of the waves and the water going up and down in the boiler and the engineer had to stay right by the throttle and he had to push the throttle in and out as the waves went by and would lift the back end of the boat and the big wheel with the paddles would come completely out of the water. There he had to shut the throttle down or the paddle wheel would turn and tear things apart.

I have a little more to say about the Distributor. The first part, while owned by the Hudson Bay Company, and the last part I think was before the Hudson Bay Company had taken it over.

It was about I believe 1932, possibly 31, anyway I had gone down to Ft. McMurray and down to the shipyards and helped to get the Athabasca ready to go in the water. Then we went down to Ft. Smith on the Athabasca River and proceeded to get the Distributor ready to go in the water.

Later on they brought in a fireman along with the engineers. I won't mention where this fireman was from or his name for various reasons. However, the engineers didn't take to this young man too well. So after we got the Distributor in the water the engineer came to me and he said that "Really it would be your shift to go on but I want this other man to learn what it is really going to be like firing this boiler. He seems to know more about it than we do, so I would just like to give him a run. We have to go about 8 miles so I want you to let him see what he can do." So I said "That's fine with me".

However I had a pretty good idea that they were really going to put him to work which they did. And finally the engineer said to him "I think we had better go and call Green". So this fella says "What can Green do? He can't do anymore than I can do. If I can't keep up steam, he can't either". So the engineer wasn't too persistent, he left him alone for a little while. But in the meantime he got the mate to go and call me, I was on the upper deck. So I come down and asked if he wanted me to take over. Well he says "You can if you want to, I am not having no luck. See what you can do".

So I went back and told Bill Malcolm who was the engineer at that time "I'm going to take over." He said "Fine". So I took over and of course gradually I got the steam up. It was down around 160 lbs. and it should have been about 210. And of course when I got it up the boat started to take off pretty good.



So anyway I forget what was said but after we got back he fired it back going downstream and of course they only run it about half throttle so he had no trouble. After we landed and that he said something to me and I said to him "Maybe I should take it out on your hide!" or something like that to him. He said "You take it out on my hide?" I said "Yeah". He reached out and grabbed me by the shirt and he just lifted me up with my legs dangling just like nothing. He just had a light shirt on and I could see the size of his arms, and boy was he ever strong! Then he set me down and he said "Now, would you like to take it out on my hide?" And I said "No thank you, I've had enough!" And that was the end of it.

However when we got back to Ft. Smith he somehow disappeared and I never heard no more about him and they brought a new fireman in - I think from one of the other boats.

However, the balance of this on about I think the 2nd year of the Distributor which would be 1920 - I believe it was. I think I was second mate at that time because I never heard about what happened until the evening when I came on shift about 6 o'clock. So if that is correct, it would be about the 2nd year of the Distributor.

You had to wash out the boiler on the steamboats because of the mud and the water that settles in the boiler and if they aren't opened up and washed out every so often the mud will build up around the firebox and cause the metal, the walls to warp. The metal is the same metal that is around the rest of the firebox. However all the firebox, overhead, down the side, the ends and around doors is all put together with what they call staybolts. That is these bolts

are threaded. They are about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch in diameter and threaded all the way. They drill holes in this metal which is quite thick. I don't remember exactly but say  $\frac{3}{8}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick. They drill holes through both the outside and the inside in a straight line. Then they run a taps through tapping out threads on both the outside plate and the inside plate. This is done all over the place probably 8 or 10 inches apart and put stay bolts in there. That is to keep the metal from moving. Then they cut them off flush (or almost flush) and they can rivet them over with a peen hammer. In the boiler room they do it with an air hammer. This is done all around the firebox so actually there is probably a six to seven inch space for water between the two metals which is held together - at least held apart or whatever you want to call it so at least the water can get down around where the fire is and that this metal will not get red hot and warp. As long as it can get water it helps to make the steam and there is no trouble with it.

However, if you go long enough and let the mud pile up in the boiler till it gets up say a foot or so, then the water will not cool this metal and it will warp and strip the threads on the stay bolts. So that is why it is necessary to stop and wash out the boilers every so often. If you didn't know this you would wonder why they done these things but that is the reason for it.

However, we had a young fella I believe from B.C. and he was supposed to go out and put the hook onto the paddle wheel at Ft. Norman so that they could shut down the steam and let it cool down, drain the boilers & wash it out which takes about 48 hours from the time you start till you stop. You cannot drain the hot water right out of the boilers. You have to let the steam go down and cool off before you blow it down. Then you blow the boilers down, blowing out the mud and stuff to a certain extent. Then you let it cool off and finally just let the water out of it. Around the firebox there is what they call hand holes. They are plates that go inside and turn and have a kind of a bar outside and the bolt comes out and you tighten a nut and a gasket in between the plate which you put inside and outside and you pull it up tight with this bolt. You have them on the four corners of your firebox.

You have to take these all off. You put in a kind of a - I would guess you would call it kind of a hoe you shove in and drive in any kind of mud or slush you can get which you can dig out along that side and crossways at the front as far as you can go. Then at the backside it goes all the way across because the fire doors are on the front and the ashpan. You dig that all out and wash it out as good as you can, which you have to do. In the later years I think they had a gasoline pump but in the years I was there it was a hand pump. You had to get two or three deck hands on a hand pump and use it to do the last part of your washing out although most of it was blown out with water and steam prior to putting the boiler down. But once you had taken the fire out of the boiler and there was no more fire and no more steam there was no means of having any kind of water. I think they replaced that in the later years with a gasoline driven motor so that the passengers would have some sanitary pump for the use in toilets and the cooks for cooking and so forth. But in the early days they never worried about such things. When you were tied up on shore you went ashore and found a toilet someplace. The doors were locked on the toilets on the boat and that's the way it was.

However, this hook on a heavy rope which one end is tied to the boat itself and, if I remember right, the rope is about six foot long and about two or three inches in diameter and a great big heavy steel hook. The engineer has to let the wheel turn very slowly and hold it with the steam and let it move very slow until you holler for him to hold it. When you holler, you put the hook on and are supposed to have a little slack after you got the hook properly on. Then you tell him to ease off. So he eases off very gently, that is letting the steam out which he's holding the wheel from turning. He eases off a little bit, letting it out until the hook takes hold on the bar on the paddle wheel and then, if it's in place and everything, you can holler and tell him it's all okay.

However, this young fella - I remember him going to put the hook on as I went off to bed. We were tied up at Ft. Norman then. When they called me about 5 o'clock I didn't know anything about it until after I had had supper and they came down and went to work and I asked where this young fella was and they told me that he went out to put the hook on and no more was ever heard of him. He was never seen. So I heard later that they had found his body several miles down the Mackenzie from Ft. Norman. The Mountie Police had found his body down there. So apparently he hadn't put the hook on properly or at the wrong time and it must have hit him and knocked him into the water and knocked him unconscious or something because in talking to him he talked as if he was a very good swimmer and had lots of experience on boats. He really should have had no trouble doing that because if he had let the wheel go too far, all he had to do was let it keep on turning until it come to the next one. I can't understand how it could possibly happen and neither could anyone else. Yet something happened and no one knew really what happened.

The engineer of course kept waiting and waiting for this party. And as he never heard from him and as he couldn't leave the throttle and just let the wheel go round. And neither could he put steam on it and hold it because he didn't know what was going on. So he had to wait until he got ahold of somebody to send them out to see what happened. And when they did they come back and said that there was nobody there. So then he got the mate to go out and fasten the wheel so he could shut it down. And that's all I ever heard about this boy - that he must have got knocked off with this big hook and drowned.

That covers most of the Distributor.

Now when we left Ft. Norman oilwells and went on to Ft. Good Hope, left Good Hope to go down the river to cut wood or trap, we camped on an island which was mostly a sandbar at the north end, we passed what we thought was the best place to cut wood. So we stopped on this island or sandbar to decide what to do. We spent the night there and my mother had insisted that I take along with me a lot of quilts. As you probably know the quilts on each side are made of cotton and the interior of the quilts is cotton batton and is quilted over so that the cotton batton doesn't move around too much inside the quilts and is usually pretty warm. However for camping the quilts of cotton and cotton batton is about the worst thing you could have and although they are very warm, if any spark gets onto the quilt unnoticed, it will burn away for hours and if any little breeze comes up it will start to blaze.

We cooked our supper on this island and went to bed. As usual when camping out you go to bed with all your clothes on. In the morning I woke up and my partner Tuffy Brazeau was laughing and that is what woke me up. I asked him what he was laughing about. So he said "You get up and you'll find out". So I took the covers off and I got up. I still didn't see what he was laughing about. He says "Look at your legs". I looked at my legs and I still didn't see what was wrong. But finally he says "Look at your left leg, your pants". So I looked down and I saw that there was about six inches of my pant leg burned away. My sock was burned through and my bare leg was there with a blister about the size of your little finger. As soon as I saw the blister my leg started to hurt! I never felt anything prior to him pointing it out. So I would surely recommend anyone camping out never to have a quilt of any description - particularly on the outside of your bedding. Be sure to use wool bedding instead of quilts. Sparks on the wool blanket will go out and not burn.

I also had a similar experience while a young boy hunting muskrats. We slept overnight near a small lake and cooked our breakfast. We had put up the tent on poles and had a log across the end of the tent to put our pillows on. I had a rifle - a 38-55-but we were going shooting muskrats so we took only our 22's. We put the rifle on the log on the outside of the tent. We put dirt and everything overtop of the fire and <sup>over</sup>any grass which there wasn't much of. But we piled dirt and sand overtop of the fire and made sure we had everything covered. We went off about a quarter of a mile to the lake and we walked around it and every once in awhile we glanced back and we didn't see anything wrong. We intended to go all around the lake. However we run into some soft mossey places so we couldn't go any further that way so we turned around and came back.

When we got back far enough to see up this knoll where we had pitched our tent we could see the poles of a tent and we thought somebody else had been there and we had not noticed them. As we got closer back we found that the tent poles were our own! The tent had burned up and the stock of the rifle. This big old stump was the culprit. It was quite rotten and ants had been working in it and the wood was very fine and apparently a spark had got into this rotten stump but didn't show any signs of smoke and we had covered our fire and left. But while we were gone the wind came up and of course the spark in this stump came to life and eventually burnt our tent and gun.

That's another thing to remember. Don't build a fire where there is any rotten logs or stumps of any description because you cannot see and some of this stuff may actually be burning and it doesn't show.

Also in the winter time I was working out on what is known as the Coalbranch at mile 37 and word came through that General Griesbach was coming out to go moose hunting. He brought along his law partner, Mr. O'Conner. I was chosen to take them out as a guide so I had a little camp a couple of miles out. I went out the night before. There was a couple of inches of fresh snow and I had come back just before dark and there was no moose tracks or anything crossing the trail. So when I took Griesbach and his partner out the next morning we came to where a moose had walked across the trail. I had been told before by someone that Colonel Griesbach was very set in his ideas. He asked me about this moose track and I told him that it wasn't there last night. He knelt down and put his fingers in the snow and said "That track is two or three days old". I said "I don't think so because it wasn't there last night".

Well he says "If your so sure, you follow it", so I did. But prior to that I had traded off my gun for one which was no good. He asked me about my gun and I told him "No, it is no good". So he gave me a gun, an army Lee Enfield, a calvary gun with a short barrel.. He showed me how it worked and you could put a shell in the barrel, then there was a kind of a tin clip which went over top of the magazine and you couldn't pump any more shells into the magazine until you pulled this clip out. There was kind of a knott on it and you had to push it kind of down and up. However he put one shell in the barrel and closed this clip and I wasn't used to that.

I only went about 3 or 4 hundred yards and through the bush tracking this moose and came to the edge of the bush and here's this great big bull moose laying down about 100 yards away. But either he got wind of me or something and he started to get up. So I up with the gun and pulled the trigger and all I got was a "click". I pumped the shell out and it was laying in the



snow. I raised the gun and tried to shoot again but all I got was a "click" - nothing!

Then I didn't know what the trouble was - I forgot all about this special arrangement - but finally it came to me when I looked at it but the moose had gone quite a distance, I suppose 400 yards or so. Anyway I put the shell in and this shell did fire but hit the moose in the rear end as he was going away from me. However it drew blood. I followed it for a ways but I knew that I was going parallel with my trail and where they would be waiting for me at this little hill (I had told them to wait there). So when I got close to this hill I swung off from following the moose to meet them and they were there waiting for me. They wanted to know what I was shooting at so I told them and I told what happened. He didn't believe me and he said "You didn't by chance pick up <sup>the shell</sup> that wouldn't fire?" And I said "Yes, I did". So I took the shell out of my pocket and I gave it to him and he picks up the gun that I had, put the shell in it and pulled the trigger but it wouldn't fire. So then he took it and put it in his own gun and it did fire. He said no more. I wanted to go hunting this moose that I had wounded but he wouldn't hear of it. So I went along with him.

However, we got nothing that day and went back home where I had been working at Sterling Colliers and next morning they decided to go for a walk by themselves. They went west of the camp along the ridge and they shot a moose but it was a cow moose. So he came back and sent a wire to Benjamin Laughten in Edmonton the chief Game Warden (I think his name was Laughten) and he wired back for him to bring the moose out and ship it to Ponoka to the asylum there, which he did.

A few days later out come another young fellow about my age named Hal Winkler. He was a hockey player. I took him out hunting and we came to where there was a deer. I was walking along the path and he was following along behind me. So I pointed to the deer for him to shoot it. But he motioned to me to shoot it because he was afraid he might miss. However we both shot about the same time and got the deer. So we skinned it out and cut it in half and each one of us would pack half of the deer back to camp. Everything went fine for awhile and finally Hal said "We better stop for a rest". So we sat down on a log and he said "You know, I'm a hockey player and I thought I was in the best condition possible but I cannot keep up with you". It so happened that at the staff house at the mine Mr. Stevens, the General Superintendent, had asked my Mother to come and look after the cooking while General Griesbach and his partner and friends were there. General Griesbach says to my Mother "You sure that boy of yours is not half monkey? He just goes over windfall like it wasn't there. We have to walk down and crawl over each separate log".

Also while trapping down the MacKenzie we woke up one night when it was real cold - down around 60 below zero - and our cabin was only chinked between the logs with moss as we had got in real late in the year as I had explained before. Had moss on the roof with snow on top of it. As we had a small cook stove which was made from sheet iron but we had a heater which was cast iron and we had them both going full blast but above the heater the pipe got too hot and I guess the moss was a little too close to the pipe and it caught fire. So I went up on the roof to pack snow around the pipe and my partner packed snow inside to put the fire out which was falling down and we made sure there was no more moss anywhere near the stove pipe.

Back to the Distributor again. We came into Ft. Smith on the trip to Acklaviak and were waiting for some freight coming from Ft. McMurray to Ft. Smith which had to be brought down to Ft. Fitzgerald and then hauled across the portage over to Ft. Smith. Then we would load it on the Distributor and go on north.

However there was some tie up someplace and we had been waiting there about ten days to two weeks. We had a crew of about 22 deck hands plus all the other engineers, firemen, cooks, etc. and we had done nothing for 10 days to 2 weeks but sit and wait.

On a Saturday afternoon late we got a wire, some kind of a wire, which said that the freight would be leaving Ft. McMurray the next day. So it took them about two days to come down and another day to haul it across the portage. The captain give orders to get up steam and we had to go down a few miles down the Slave River and I believe cut about a half a dozen big trees and tow them back to Ft. Smith, pull them up on the bank (which we pulled them in and up on the bank with a steam winch pulley). So all we had to do really was to saw them down with a cross cut saw, trim them up, drag them out with a cable, drag them out of the water and that was all. It would probably take us about a half a day.

However the 22 deck hands went on strike because the morning we were to take off was a Sunday morning and they wouldn't work on Sunday, so they said, and that meant we would be tied up until Monday. Anyway I was second mate at this time on the Distributor. The captain was called "Roaring Shannon" on account of his loud voice I guess. So they had the RCMP and they had meetings and so forth and so on. But it didn't amount to anything and nothing happened. It came Sunday night and we are still tied up. So I came on shift at 6 o'clock on Sunday evening and the Captain came to me and gave me my orders. He said if the ones who were on strike didn't come willing to go back to work that I was to carry their bed rolls out and not carry them ashore but throw them towards the shore as far as I could and if they landed in the water it was too bad.

Well that put me in rather a bad position. I had the Captain's orders but also I had become acquainted with these 22 men and some of them were from Edmonton and I didn't like to do that. However about 10 o'clock a bunch of them came down. All the gangplanks were pulled in and also foot planks - there was no way to get on the boat. But we had a foot plank. So I talked to the boys who were on shore and I told them what my orders were and they said they wanted to talk to the Captain. "Well" I said "If it's the same thing you have been talking about, it's no use". No, they said they wanted to talk to him. So I went and I woke up the first mate and told him the story and he went around with me and we talked to the Captain. The Captain says "Let two of them on and bring them up to the top deck where my room is and I'll see what they got to say".

So I shoved the footplank down and let two of them up and pulled the plank in and I took them up. Mind you all the lights were out and all we had was a coal oil lantern as everything had been shut down again. I took them up anyway to talk to the Captain. I went in and woke up the Captain and told them I had the two of them there and he says "Show them in". So I went out and I called them. There was two or three steps up to the Captain's room from the Texas deck (that's the upper deck) and you had to go up these couple of steps and then into the Captain's room and he was

in bed. So I took one of them into the Captain's room and the other one stood with me outside the door. I don't know what took place but the next thing I knew the Captain had jumped out of bed and shoved this one fellow out and knocked the other fellow down the steps. Both of them went down the steps and the Captain after them. I'm holding this lantern. So I went and set the lantern down, thinking it was out of the road. There was a scuffle and the lantern got knocked over and by the time I got the lantern picked up again all the fight had gone out of these two boys and they were willing to go.

So I took them down and they went and got their bed rolls and I put down the gang plank and they took them ashore and came back and got all the rest of the bed rolls and took them ashore and I pulled the gangplank back up. However I stayed with the gangplank so that no one else could come on board but the two of them.

It turned out that one of these boys, I didn't know at the time, but his name was Charlie Horricks. In later years he had a dairy north of Edmonton a couple of miles known as Horricks' Dairy.

So they had to get a whole new crew and we got everything done.

Also at Athabasca Landing there was plenty of whiskey around Athabasca but they weren't supposed to take any whiskey north of Athabasca or down the river. But there was whiskey getting by someplace but they didn't know how.

I belonged to the Athabasca Citizen's Band and sometimes I went down to the river fishing. This time I was fishing where the scows were tied up. At the back end of the scows someone had figured how to get whiskey up the north and the mounties wouldn't find it. They would sometimes make them unload their scows and go through all of the stuff and then reload it again. Sometimes they would stay there and watch them load the scows and make sure there was nothing on it.

However, they figured out how to do it. As the back end of the scow was not up against the shore but out in a little deeper water, they had put two nails - one on each side about 18 inches to two feet from the outer edge of the scow underneath the bottom. When this scow was loaded down, this string and the bottles attached to it would be well down in the water and no way to be seen. I believe they put the bottles in woolen socks of some kind and tied them onto this string that they had across the bottom of the scow.

When fishing my line had got tangled up at the very edge of the scow and the string that was across and there was enough slack that I could pull it out and the string that was attached to it. So I waded in the water and unhooked it and in doing so I could see that something was tied on underneath. So I felt of it and it was a bottle tied up in an old sock.

It so happened that one of the mounties there was going with my sister and later married my sister and so I told him about it. So what happened after that I don't know but they did confiscate the whiskey in any case and I guess they found some way to check underneath the scows.

Back to trapping again down the MacKenzie. I went for a walk down the MacKenzie about a mile from our cabin and I saw lots of fox tracks. So I kind of followed them and came to this little creek coming from this lake back a ways from the river. I came to where on the creek there was quite a deep hole but where the water ran out it was very shallow and there was a whole bunch of small fish in this hole but there was no way that they could get out and the ice had froze over but on the very edge the fox had managed to break the ice before it had frozen too much. They had a good sized hole and the fox were going onto the ice and eating these little fish. I believe I caught about 12 foxes at that particular place.

Then we had a trapline for marten and we got two wolverines on part of our trapline and they would tear the marten or rabbits or anything that was in the traps and take them out and bury them in the snow and come back and keep on going down the trapline until it was all out. Anything that was in the trapline they would take out and bury it.

My partner finally set a rifle and made a little "V" fence, tied the rifle to a tree and run a string around it somehow out to the end of the barrel with a bait on it. One wolverine shot himself but we still had one more. Eventually he got his foot in a trap but he chewed the drag off the the trap so that all that was left was the trap with the chain dragging. But the trap balled up with snow and became quite a good sized ball of ice about 6 inches in diameter and the trap was double spring so it would be about 18 inches long and he went through the snow dragging this trap.

I followed it for the first few miles I didn't know anything about wolverines at that time and I wouldn't do the same thing today. I followed him and followed him and finally he went under the snow and didn't come out again. I tramped all around trying to figure where he was for the fact that he didn't come out meant he had to be someplace around. However it was very lucky that I didn't find him because of what I have found out about wolverines today. If he had of come out he would have probably chewed me up pretty bad before I could have got around to killing him as they are a very vicious animal. So thank goodness I didn't find him.

I also spoke about this man Perry and his daughter and children that they all came over and skinned out our muskrats. He also told us boys that if either one of us would marry his daughter that he would show us where there was lots of white man's gold. He was a guide for the gold seekers of 1898 that stayed at New Chicago on the MacKenzie River (there's a picture of New Chicago included in what I wrote).

I spoke of the Post Manager at Ft. Good Hope - by the way his name is Burt Furlong. He had married an Eskimo girl who had been educated I believe in Montreal but he was the Post Manager there at Ft. Good Hope. I told him about what this man Perry had told us. So he said "He tells every young fella that comes along the same story. He's only trying to marry his daughter off to someone".



Also while following this wolverine which was away back two or three miles east of the MacKenzie River up on the high bank I came to a place where the wolverine had gone that looked kind of odd so I took off one snowshoe and scraped it all off to see what had caused this particular spot as there had been some animals around and I couldn't figure out why or if the wolverine had been there or what. I scraped it off and there had been quite a large log. I scraped it off and apparently in the summer time before the snow, bears had been digging in it, possibly for ants or something, but as you went down 3 or 4 inches you come to frost. However they had scraped off quite a little bit and as I remember what was showing would be approximately 24 inches or more of a log which part of it that was above ground had been rotten and the bears had torn it apart. And you could see spots also where partridge had got in there and scratched around and dusted themselves. Whether or not they eat ants, I don't know.

However, the funny part of this is that there is no trees all through that country for miles that are more than 3 or 4 inches at the butt. Then they seemed to die and fall down -they didn't grow any bigger. I would assume it was on account of this perma frost. But where did this large log come from? It was at least two feet across and the stump would be bigger than that because the edges were slopping on both sides. I would assume at some time the log would have been at least three feet if not more in diameter. It must have been there for years and years when there was a warmer climate or something but I never did go back to find out more about it. It just must of been one of those things that you find in the north country. Something that must have happened hundreds of years ago.